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Henrik Ibsen

By the Same Author

Maeterlinck's Symbolism : The
Blue Bird & other Essays

On Maeterlinck : or Notes on
the Study of Symbols

838-8239
R17211

Henrik Ibsen

Poet, Mystic & Moralist

by Henry Rose ♪ ♪



Jonathan Cape

Eleven Gower Street, London

1111

First Published 1913
Reissued by Jonathan
Cape :: :: 1921

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“EVERYTHING that I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal—or actual—experience ; in every new poem or play I have aimed at my own spiritual emancipation and purification—for a man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs. Hence I once wrote the following dedicatory lines in a copy of one of my books :

To live—is to war with fiends
That infest the brain and the heart ;
To write—is to summon one’s self,
And play the judge’s part.”

Henrik Ibsen to Ludwig Passarge.

“ People believe that I have changed my views in the course of time. This is a great mistake. My development has, as a matter of fact, been absolutely consistent. I myself can distinctly follow and indicate the thread of its whole course—the unity of my ideas and their gradual development.”

Henrik Ibsen to L. Dietrichson.

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Biographical Forewords

HENRIK IBSEN was born on March 20th, 1828, at Skein, a small port on the south coast of Norway depending chiefly on the timber trade. His father, Knud Henriksen Ibsen, was of Danish, Scottish and German extraction; his mother, Marie Cornelia Altenburg, was a German. Many of his ancestors on the male side had been sailors, but the father, Knud, was a merchant. He was a man of reckless and extravagant habits. From this cause, whilst Ibsen was still a young boy, the family was reduced from affluence to poverty, and compelled to live in a small farm-house on the outskirts of Skein. One result of the collapse in the fortunes of the family was that Ibsen's schooling was very much limited. Henrik's ambition was to become an artist. He received some elementary teaching in drawing and painting, but the father could not afford the fees necessary for his complete training. In 1843, when he was only fifteen years of age, he was apprenticed to an apothecary at Grimstad. Of help from his father he thenceforward had none. Neither does it appear that he was aided by any other member of the family. Apparently he had to depend entirely on his own very narrow resources.

Grimstad is a dreary little township, surrounded with hills and standing in a dark bay. Ibsen's residence here, first as apprentice and then as assistant, lasted six years, and though favourable to study and contemplation, was as monotonous as it was long. During the whole of this period he was a more diligent student of literature and art

than of chemistry or of medicine. His literary career began in his apprenticeship days with the writing of poetry and with dramatic studies, amongst which was the composition of a blank-verse tragedy, "Catilina." With the aid of two youthful companions who shared his literary enthusiasm this was published at Christiania, but it had a sale of only about thirty copies. During the whole of this time Ibsen was "excruciatingly poor." Yet in 1850, when he was twenty-one years of age, he went to Christiania with a half-formed object of studying medicine and joining the University. He entered the school of a teacher named Heltberg, where he had as fellow-students Björnson, Jonas Lie and others who afterwards became famous. Björnson's impression of him was afterwards expressed in the lines :

"Tense and lean, the colour of gypsum,
Behind a vast coal-black beard, Henrik Ibsen."

Ibsen now wrote a one-act play, "The Viking's Barrow," which was accepted by the Christiania Theatre, but which was performed only three times. For more than a year he made a precarious livelihood as a journalist and by the painting of crude pictures, becoming all the while less and less regular in his studies for the University. Poverty and inclination alike appear to have induced him to give up the idea of qualifying in medicine, and late in 1851 he accepted an appointment offered to him by Ole Bull, the violinist, of "stage poet" to the theatre at Bergen. His work was to assist the theatre as dramatic author. He had a small fixed salary and also a travelling allowance. Thus he was enabled to visit Copenhagen and Dresden for the purpose of studying the dramatic art in those cities. He made many experiments in dramatic work during his tenure of office at the Bergen Theatre, the most important being the writing and production of "Lady Inger of Östråt"—the first of his plays to be afterwards

recognised as worthy of a place in the authorised editions of his collected works.

In 1856, whilst still holding the appointment at Bergen, he married Susannah Thoresen, a woman well able to aid him in his life-work. She was the daughter of a rector in Bergen, and at the time of the marriage had as step-mother Magdalene Thoresen, a well-known authoress. In the following year Ibsen returned to Christiania, having been invited to become director of the Norwegian Theatre there. He was now for some time engaged in theatrical management and in the writing of plays. In the whole course of his efforts he had a terribly hard struggle, for the theatre at which he was employed, only the second theatre in the city, was in financial difficulties at the time when he was engaged for it and never got out of them during his connection with it. From this cause he had to suffer many disappointments and humiliations, until, in 1862, a crisis was reached and the concern became bankrupt.

In something of desperation Ibsen appealed to the Storting for a poet's pension in order that he might go on with his literary work. This was refused, owing not a little, it may be assumed, to the fact that he had made many enemies by his satires on officialdom and by his uncompromising independence of mind. Happily he succeeded in getting small travelling grants from the Council of the Christiania University, and these, eked out by gifts from friends by whom his genius was in some measure appreciated, enabled him in furtherance of his studies to visit various places in Europe, very notably Rome, a city to which he became greatly attached.

But the money that he obtained did not last long; his literary work was still unremunerative, and in 1863 he once more appealed for a poet's pension. This was again refused, but a lump sum of £90 was awarded to him. Thus aided, Ibsen struggled on. Great physical weakness

added to the strain of his poverty. Nevertheless, he was able during his residence in Rome to do his first conspicuously successful work as a creative writer. By virtue of this he took rank as a prophet who had honour outside his own country and from those who were not his own kin. A result of this demonstration of Ibsen's genius was that in 1866 the Storting voted the pension which formerly it had refused, a sum of £90 per annum.

The life of Ibsen from this time forward may best be read in his writings, wherein, too, his character is most made manifest. In an external sense his life was uneventful. Released from carking cares of poverty he was able to devote himself with a free mind to his work, and his life became an ideal life for a literary man. His struggles now were the struggles of the spirit rather than of the flesh. No intellectual and artistic worker ever cultivated his powers more assiduously, took a finer measure of their quality and extent, and used them with wiser economy than he did. His vocation was the writing of plays, and to him every vocation to which by his talents a man was called was a sacred trust.

In time his writings became a source of income beside which the poet's pension from the State was a trifle. He chose his places of residence from the point of view of the conditions most favourable for his work, with, for a time, the further special motive of securing the best education for his son, Sigurd. In 1868 he left Rome for Dresden, where chiefly he stayed until 1874. He then returned to Norway for a short visit, in the course of which he had many proofs of admiration from men by whom formerly he had been reviled. Afterwards he lived for the most part at Dresden and Munich, until, finally, in 1891, he settled in Christiania. In 1898 there was a great public celebration in that city in honour of his seventieth birthday, and in the following year a statue of him was

placed outside the Christiania Theatre. He died in 1906. By the unanimous vote of the Storthing he was accorded a public funeral. The King of Norway attended in person; King Edward VII was represented by the British Minister.

Of the personal appearance of Ibsen when at his prime a good pen portrait is given by Mr. Havelock Ellis in a preface which he wrote for an English edition of three plays by Ibsen which were published some years ago. From this portrait we learn that Ibsen was rather small in stature, but impressive in manner and vigorous in movement. He had a peculiarly broad and high forehead, with small, keen, blue-grey eyes "which seemed to penetrate to the heart of things." He had the firm and compressed mouth which is characteristic of a man of iron will. Altogether his face was remarkable and significant, though far from the typical "pure, extravagant, yearning, questioning artist's face." It recalled rather the faces of some of our most distinguished surgeons; "as was perhaps meet in the case of a writer who used so skilful and daring a scalpel to cut to the core of social diseases." Amongst intimate friends he could be expansive and free in his conversation, and often he showed that he was well able to accommodate himself to humble and homely people. But in society he was usually reserved and silent; when he talked it was preferably on the most ordinary topics—the result no doubt of his horror of anything that looked like posing.

Such was the man so far as we can here glance at him. But, I repeat, from the time when he was successfully launched on his literary career, his life and character may best be read in his writings. The scope and aim of these are dealt with in the present volume, with just such further specific biographical and quasi-biographical references as may help to the better understanding of them.

As each succeeding play of Ibsen's was produced it was the subject of keen disputation, especially amongst people in his own country, who sometimes perceived and sometimes imagined that they perceived in his writings satirical applications to events and conditions in their political and social life. No doubt the plays admitted of these applications in some cases. But it may be questioned whether they ever admitted of them to so large an extent or as often as the contemporary critics supposed. Be this as it may, to students outside of Scandinavia these applications are of small and diminishing value. By them it is the more universal and permanent elements of Ibsen's writings that will alone be cherished: it is with these alone that in the present volume I have been concerned.

Unlike most of those writers who have commented on the work of Ibsen hitherto, I made my first acquaintance with that work when the career of the dramatist was already ended, and have been able to study his plays as a complete whole in entire freedom from the temporary distractions of the controversies which each play produced, whether in relation to Norwegian political and social life or, as sometimes was the case, in relation to the more passing phases of thought and feeling in Europe generally. This, I venture to think, has given me some special advantages for forming a comprehensive and balanced estimate of Ibsen's writings in their more universal and permanent aspects. Possibly this freshness of experience also has enabled me the better to trace the relationship of the plays with one another. It will be seen that Ibsen's claim that his plays form an ordered whole, that his works as a whole have a living inward connection, is a sound claim. The task of showing this, which Ibsen at one time contemplated but left undone, is one of the tasks which I have set before myself.

My hope is that this book will serve as a simple and

“ popular ” introduction to the plays of Ibsen, and at the same time help to illumine the work of a great heroic man of letters, who was not only one of the most original of modern dramatic poets, but a bold and courageous ethical teacher, gifted with the insight of the mystic—one who has not yet come fully into his kingdom, and whose reputation must increase with the passing of the years.

H. R.

Henrik Ibsen :

Poet, Mystic and Moralist

Chapter I

Earlier Plays

Evolution of a Master-Mind—First Literary Works—Aim after “Interestingness”—Thoughts on Religion—“Brand” and “Peer Gynt”—Prevalent Spiritual and Worldly Ideals.

THE career of Henrik Ibsen, like that of many another man of genius, was marked by stages of spiritual development. Although, as was natural, those stages overlapped one another, being the result of the gradual evolution of a master-mind, they are easy to distinguish when we survey Ibsen's work as a whole.

In his earlier years Ibsen aimed most of all to write plays that should have the quality which Tolstoy, in “What is Art,” describes as “interestingness.” These were plays in which he sought to present vivid pictures of the life of the past and of the present, with truthful and forceful incident and characterisation, plays which in a good and wholesome way were likely to attract and entertain the

playgoer, but had no manifest suggestion of religious, ethical, or didactic purpose.

This was the period, ranging from 1855 to 1863, in which were produced, in the order here named, "Lady Inger of Östråt," "The Feast at Solhoug," "The Vikings," "Love's Comedy," and "The Pretenders."

It must be admitted that in the works in this list which are historical the note of patriotism is struck, and that, in the contrasts of character and conflicts of passion which are put before us, we have reminders that in human life there is no escape from the power of the moral law. But it was not definitely to inspire patriotism or to illustrate moral truths that these plays were written; if they do the one or the other it is simply because there can be no honest presentation of the facts of national life or individual character from which lessons of love and duty, whether social or personal, may not be deduced. The governing aim of Ibsen in writing these plays was to produce works that should have the quality to which I have referred—the quality of "interestingness."

A like remark applies, and even more strongly, to the lighter and non-historical of these works, "Love's Comedy," in which Ibsen gives us, however, a foretaste of that power of satirising unreality in social and domestic life which he was to develop later on with tremendous effect.

When from these earlier works we proceed to "Brand" and "Peer Gynt" (1865 to 1867), we may study a new stage in Ibsen's development.

In passing, it may be observed that "Brand" is the play which first secured European recognition

for the genius of Ibsen, and, coincidently, the granting of the pension from the Norwegian Storting, of which Ibsen was greatly in need at the time. On the other hand, "Peer Gynt" met with so much adverse criticism from a leading critic of the day, Clemens Petersen, as to provoke from Ibsen the characteristic and memorable retort: "My book is poetry: and if it is not, then it will be. The conception of poetry in our country, in Norway, shall be made to conform to the book. There is no fixity in the world of ideas."

"Brand" and "Peer Gynt" are the works of a writer in whom concern for the religious and ethical ideals of his time has become dominant. Ibsen is an artist; he remains, as throughout his life he was bound to remain, strongly conscious of the value of literary form. And "interestingness" does not at any time cease to be of importance to him. But at the period to which I now refer, the scope and purpose of his life become larger. Now he perceives that he may not only be a great dramatist, but also a great teacher.

Looking round upon the life of his age, he finds that the religious and the worldly or actual ideals which in general are held are not only mistaken, but positively injurious. The religious ideal is a spurious form of self-abnegation; the worldly or actual ideal is that of self-seeking. And the conclusion is borne in upon him that in the prevalent state of feeling and practice these ideals are not so essentially different as is commonly imagined.

It is true that there is a noble, a divine self-abnegation. But there is also a spurious and unreal self-abnegation. Paradoxical though it may seem to say so, the apparent self-sacrifice of many a re

religious devotee is simply the price that he is paying in the present for what appears to him as a vast and otherwise unattainable future advantage—to himself. It is a more damnable and damning form of selfishness than is that of the man who acts from a desire to grasp and enjoy the fleeting pleasures of the moment, careless of the effect which his manner of gratifying this desire has upon his own true well-being, or upon the well-being of others. Ibsen saw this clearly. To him it was manifest that the religious ideal of his time was very largely of the character which I have thus indicated. And the worldly ideal was its natural complement.

Ibsen's theories on this aspect of religion in relation to life were worked out in "Brand" and in "Peer Gynt." That Brand, the central figure of the play first named, is without thought for others is, of course, not to be supposed. He is chosen by Ibsen not as the worst, but rather as the best type of the class of religious devotee to which I allude. He is a man of heroic mould, no priest who has imagined that his rôle was that of spiritual law-giver and judge to his flock was ever more so. Undeniably, too, he is faithful to the truth as he sees it. That which is real and genuine alone appeals to him.

It was these traits of character which Ibsen no doubt had in mind when, on October 28th, 1870, he said, in a letter to Peter Hansen: "Brand is myself at my best moments." But the personal comparison must not be taken too literally or narrowly if we are to judge Ibsen and his work rightly. The points of likeness between Brand and Ibsen are many, but the points of difference are many also.

In all matters that concern the salvation of his own soul Brand, as Ibsen depicts him, is a fanatic. If Heaven could be taken by assault he would be the first to scale the wall. And, alas, the consuming thought of his life is that, at any rate, *he* shall get there.

Had his thought and his activities not been misdirected by the wrong ideal of his time, Brand would have been one of the first to take the course that was truly wise and right. As it is, his life is a tragic failure, and the reason of this failure is that with him, as with all those who cherish such an ideal as his was, the desire for the well-being of others was subordinate to his concern for his own salvation. Brand with deepest passion cried, "What shall *I* do to be saved?" The nobler course would have been that—gathering to his fold all whom fortune or chance had brought within the range of his influence—he should have asked, "What shall *we* do to be saved?" He should have recognised that with self-abnegation must go loving sympathy and human service.

But just as Ibsen gave us in "Brand" a great type of the mistaken or perverted religious ideal of his day, he gave us in "Peer Gynt" a great type of the worldly ideal of his day.

Self-abnegation in religion, where unaccompanied by the spirit of love and by active service for Humanity, has its correlative in practical life in a strenuous form of selfishness which strives after riches and the exercise of rule over others. Peer Gynt is a type of the selfish man who, so long as he can pursue his own worldly ends in his own way, is content to leave out of mind all questions of religion, all questions that relate to his soul's

future. There is in him, as in Brand, something of the heroic. He does things on a large scale. But, pursuing his own ends, seeking to find or to express himself without the slightest practical regard for others, he fails just as Brand fails. For his ideal, not less than the ideal of Brand, is contrary to the Divine order. And the pursuit of the ideal of selfishness in worldly affairs inevitably results in disease and death—to those who practise it, and to those on whom it is practised. This is a fact which we must be especially careful to bear in mind when we come to consider, as we shall do later on, the trend of Ibsen's thought in his social plays.

Chapter II

History and Religion

“ Emperor and Galilean ”—Christianity in Conflict with Paganism—Problem of Religious Reconstruction—The “ Third Empire.”

“ **B**RAND ” and “ Peer Gynt ” mark, as I have explained, the second stage in the evolution of Ibsen’s work. After “ Peer Gynt ” came “ The League of Youth ” (1869), which, notwithstanding its qualities of political satire, may be viewed as representing a temporary reversion to the first stage of Ibsen’s work, the stage in which he aimed after “ interestingness ” more especially.

And now Ibsen entered upon what may be viewed as a third stage in his development. This is represented by the writing, between 1870 and 1873, of the two plays, “ Cæsar’s Apostasy ” and “ The Emperor Julian,” which he published under the general title of “ Emperor and Galilean.”

In Volume I of the “ Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen,” issued by Heinemann, Mr. William Archer, the editor, who is in most cases also the translator, gives an extremely illuminative introduction to the first of the plays, “ Lady Inger of Östråt.” In this introduction he makes the following statement with respect to Ibsen’s boyhood :

“ We hear of his cutting out fantastically dressed figures in paste-board, attaching them to wooden blocks, and

ranging them in groups or tableaux. He may be said, in short, to have had a toy theatre without the stage. In all these amusements it is possible, with a little good-will, to divine the coming dramatist. . . . The education he received was of the most ordinary, but included a little Latin. The subjects which chiefly interested him were history and religion."

If the conclusion to which Mr. Archer invites us as to the early bent of Ibsen's mind towards the stage is partly dependent on inference, requires the exercise of "a little good-will" applied to the records of the boy's amusements, the final statement of the words which I have quoted needs no aid of the kind. It is clear, definite, and unqualified. "The subjects which chiefly interested him were history and religion."

In all respects was the trite saying that the boy is father of the man illustrated in Ibsen's case. He showed his love of the drama and of history in making the writing of plays on historic themes the main object of his ambition as a young man. Later on, in "Brand" and "Peer Gynt," whilst the historical element was put aside, the religious element became more or less dominant, in "Brand" almost quite dominant. But when, in the third period of his career, he took up the task of writing "Emperor and Galilean," history and religion together absorbed his thoughts.

That this was the case is evident from many of Ibsen's utterances at this time. For example, when "Emperor and Galilean" was well advanced, he wrote to his publisher, Hegel: "This book will be my chief work, and it is engrossing all my thoughts and all my time. That positive view of the world which the critics have so long been demanding

of me, they will find here." And to Mr. Edmund Gosse, after saying that he was putting into this play a part of his own spiritual life, he wrote: "The historical theme which I have chosen has a much closer relation to the movements of our own time than one might at first suppose."

All competent judges will agree that Ibsen was mistaken in his estimate of the relative value of the work on which he was then employed: he had written better plays before, and better plays were still to come from his pen. But as an indication of his spirit and aims at this time these statements are of practical value.

We may see in "Brand" and "Peer Gynt" how Ibsen affirms a belief in a Divine government of the universe, and pictures disaster and failure as inevitable accompaniments of self-seeking, whether the spiritual self-seeking, if we may use the term, of a Brand, or the material and sensual self-seeking of a Peer Gynt. But the doctrines which he had thus touched upon, important though they were from the point of view of personal faith and conduct, were only a part of the vast problem of religious reconstruction which he was bent on solving to the best of his power.

Profoundly dissatisfied with the existing religious and social ideals, Ibsen had entered upon the task of historical retrospect with a view to the recovery, or the discovery as the case might be, of the higher truths. He studied the facts of the earlier days of Christianity, those days more especially when the teachings of the Man of Galilee entered into acutest conflict with Paganism. Doubtless it was his hope that in the examination of those teachings, or of the lives of those by whom they were understood to have

been received, at the period at which it was to be assumed that they were in their pristine power, he would be able to get a real grip of their essential or most vital qualities.

This was a line of inquiry which was most important and necessary. But Ibsen had not long been engaged upon it before he came to conclusions which gave a new direction to his thought. There can be little doubt that as his work progressed a sense of disappointment grew upon him, even in the contemplation of Christianity in the earlier stages of its existence. Apparently it seemed to him as though the truths which lay at the base of Christ's teaching either were not in themselves sufficient to solve the problem to the study of which he was then devoted, or else, as was, of course, much more probable, that the interpretations and applications of those truths by the early Christians, resulting as they did very often in morbid and diseased conditions, were not such as his finer instincts and perceptions could approve. A religion which had its strongest manifestations in fanaticism and self-immolation—a religion in which, even where the spirit of love and self-sacrifice was most manifest, the joy of life was continually repressed, and men were referred in their search for happiness to a distant future or to another world, could not possibly provide the complete solution for which he sought.

The conventional or orthodox comment on this presentation of the case will be, that if I have defined Ibsen's position rightly, he made a mistake in judging Christianity on the basis of the evidence which he derived from a study of the period of Julian ; that, in fact, his right course would have

been simply to have taken the teachings of the Founder of Christianity and to have formed his judgment upon them. To this it must be replied that the extreme practicality of his mind would forbid him adopting that course.

A religion does not consist in the example and precepts of a founder. These provide the standards by which we may estimate the founder's mind and personality. But the religion itself is to be judged as a working system. It is to be judged by its effects in raising the quality of individual life spiritually and actually, and, most of all, by its effects in binding men together, and, at the same time, elevating their collective life. So, at any rate, it appeared to Ibsen.

But not only did his study of Christianity as a working system, or, shall we say, his study of Christianity as practised in those early days, lead him to perceive in it certain aspects which, wisely or unwisely, he felt to be repellent; the fact also became evident to him that, whatever guidance the study of the past might give for the regulation of our conduct in the present and the future, there could be no return to earlier conditions of thought and feeling—that even if the ideals of the earlier Christians were, for them, the best attainable, it was not by looking back to those ideals, but by forming clear and definite views of our own that real progress in the present could be promoted. He saw that to attempt to hark back to the earlier conditions of belief would be to repeat in another form the mistake of the Emperor Julian.

The Emperor Julian, who is the central figure of "Emperor and Galilean," on his part saw that the religious life of his time had become feeble and false.

A new faith was offered to him in Christianity, but instead of frankly and freely accepting this new faith—a course which, even from the point of view of statesmanship, and apart from the fact that the new faith was an advance upon the faith then prevalent, would have been his better course—he paltered with it, and sought to restore the teaching and practice of Paganism, so far as they appeared to him to be vital. Failure came to him, as it must ever come where the ideal is wrong or mistaken—as, indeed, it was already represented by Ibsen to have overtaken Brand. Julian failed because he took no account of human growth. For truly as the race advances to maturity, old ideals no longer suffice, and new and higher ones become necessary.

All this, I say, presented itself to Ibsen most vividly. And there arose in his mind the question: What was the ideal which in his own day and generation was most needed, or most likely to satisfy the demands of the higher Humanity? The answer which he gave to this question was the one to which his present studies most naturally led him. In conflict with Christianity, as it was practised in Julian's day, he had seen Paganism with its Nature-worship, which, rightly understood, was the spontaneous or exaggerated expression of the joy of life which many Christians in the early days condemned as, with varying degrees of intensity, many Christians have done ever since. What he had gazed upon was in reality a conflict of two ideals, spiritually of two Empires. Ibsen was not prepared to admit that either ideal was necessarily or inherently false. Nay, far from doing so, he felt that, however perverted and misunderstood, the two ideals represented complementary truths, or forms of truth. It was

necessary, in his judgment, that these forms of truth should be combined, and that human life should be based on their equal recognition.

What Ibsen now conceived was an ideal in which the higher qualities of the Empires of Paganism and of Christianity might be blended. This ideal he figured by the term "the Third Empire."

It was in the autumn of 1873 that "Emperor and Galilean" was published. In January, 1875, when his work was already well known and had been much discussed, Ibsen, in writing to Dr. George Brandes, observed:

"Only entire nations can join in great intellectual movements. A change of front in our conception of life and of the world is no parochial matter: and we Scandinavians, as compared with other nations, have not got beyond the parish-council standpoint. But nowhere do you find a parish council anticipating and furthering 'the Third Empire.'"

More than twelve years later, on September 24th, 1887, Ibsen made a speech at a festive gathering at Stockholm, and in the course of it he said:

"I have sometimes been called a pessimist: and indeed I am one, inasmuch as I do not believe in the eternity of human ideals"—i.e. in some particular ideal being sufficient for all time—"But I am also an optimist, inasmuch as I fully and confidently believe in the ideal's power of propagation and of development. Especially and definitely do I believe that the ideals of our time, as they pass away, are tending towards that which, in my drama of 'Emperor and Galilean,' I have designated as 'the Third Empire.' Let me, therefore, drain my glass to the growing, the coming time."

How far in "Emperor and Galilean" Ibsen follows the facts of history with minuteness and fidelity may be a matter for argument. But for our

present purpose it is not material to inquire closely on this point. It may be assumed that, like our own Shakespeare, when dealing with historical themes, he was more concerned to represent the spirit of the past than to give a record of events. The point to be noted is that in this, the third stage in the evolution of his thought, he had come to see that it was impossible to return from a feeble or false religious ideal of the present to a past religious ideal, however noble, and, moreover, that a new ideal, expressed in the term "the Third Empire," had now completely entered into his mind.

Chapter III

Plays of Social Life

Obstacles to Religious and Social Progress—Ibsen's True Mission—A Work of Clearance—Primary Doctrines—Truth and Freedom—"Pillars of Society."

WE come now to a fourth stage in the evolution of the genius of Ibsen. With faith in "the ideal's power of propagation and development," with confidence that as the ideals of his own time passed away the greater ideal which he foreshadowed—the ideal which is figured by the term "the Third Empire"—would be ushered in, he yet saw on every hand immense retarding influences. Individual life, as he observed it and had experience of it amongst those around him, was in many cases hypocritical and false. And life, so far as it was collective, was petty and at best parochial—in his own country especially so. There were shams and vicious conventions in every direction. The first task of any reformer who desired to make the world better and wiser was to clear away the obstacles to the reception of Truth, and to all forms of practical progress. Right channels of thought and feeling had to be created. Here and there explosive forces were required; spiritually, there was even navy's work and some scavenging to be done. It is only necessary to look at Ibsen's writings at this time, to see that it was to the task which he thus

discerned that his best energies were now consistently and persistently applied.

The plays of this period were "Pillars of Society," "A Doll's House," "Ghosts," "An Enemy of the People," "The Wild Duck," and "Rosmersholm." They cover the years from 1877 to 1886.

If we deduce what his views were as to the special and peculiar needs of the age, from a survey of the institutions and conditions which in these plays he most attacked and exposed, we must come to the conclusion that he would have defined those needs thus:

The enforcement and practice of truthfulness in all human relations.

The practice of prudence and wisdom in entering into contracts, and especially in respect to the most important and solemn of all contracts, marriage.

Fidelity to contracts when made—in itself a concomitant of truthfulness.

Recognition of the doctrine of individual and social responsibility, and most notably of parental responsibility, in relation to which our attention was to be especially directed to the correlative doctrine of heredity.

Recognition of the evil of the love of power for its own sake, or from selfishness, as distinct from the love of power for the sake of social service and real social use.

Recognition of the right of each man and woman to live his or her own life, subject to the practical admission of the equal right of others, and subject also to the conditions indicated already of the practice of truth in social relations and to the duty of fulfilling contracts when made.

These, in Ibsen's view, were society's most pressing needs. The "Third Empire," with its ideal of the combination of all that was best in the teaching of Christianity and Paganism, had a mighty fascination for his untrammelled mind. But the first thing needful was the right application of these

more elementary truths as to which his vision was especially clear. And according to his estimate of the degree of the importance of these truths, he represented in his plays the need of their application—by displaying in various forms the results of their nonapplication.

First of the plays of this period comes, as we have seen, "Pillars of Society." In this play Ibsen lays down the doctrine of the paramount importance of Truth and Freedom in human relations. "The spirits of Truth and Freedom—these are the Pillars of Society," exclaims Lona as the curtain finally falls.

The Truth that is meant is Truth not merely of speech, but of action or conduct; the Freedom is not merely political Freedom—with this the author is not here concerned—but Freedom from shackles imposed by false notions of respectability and fear of public opinion, and by wrong aims of life, as, for instance, the love of worldly distinction.

Consul Bernick, who is regarded by everybody in the small seaport in which the scene is laid as the chief pillar of their social and industrial life, has acquired his reputation and riches by fraud. He may be assumed to have embezzled from his own mother, and to have deprived his sister of the share of the family estate that otherwise would have been hers. For offences which he himself committed he has caused his wife's brother to suffer grievously, both in fortune and in reputation. He has inflicted cruel wrongs on members of his family, on his workmen, and on the community, all for the sake of worldly advantage. And when his despicable crimes are being brought home to him, and his conscience is being awakened, nothing so much

hinders him from the acknowledgment of his faults and from the doing of justice as the thought of what will be said by those upon whose good-will—secured by methods of deception—he has so much depended hitherto for the gratification of his vanity and ambition. He does, however, take the course which his duty now prescribes.

The public acknowledgment which Bernick makes of the falsity of his past life, and his choice for the freedom which is to be found in right-doing, may seem sudden ; we may infer that the exigencies of stage representation have hampered the author in the development of the psychology of his leading character : men in Bernick's position are sometimes driven with swiftness to suicide, but rarely, if ever, to such sudden repentance and confession as are here depicted. But the ethical principles which the author seeks to enforce are sound and unmistakable—the Pillars of Society are the spirits of Truth and Freedom.

It is important to note that in this play we have evidence that Ibsen had by this time closely studied some of the economic problems which so much occupied the attention of the best leaders of thought in political and social science in his time, and are still pressing with us. The effect of new inventions in making employment more precarious to individual workers, and the power of the capitalist under the present conditions of industrial organisation to enslave the workman—not alone in an economic sense, but in a moral sense also, by making him, if the interests of the capitalist so demand, a helpless instrument of dishonest industry—and, finally, the power of the capitalist to create and consolidate monopolies to the public detriment, are themes which are dealt

with. And each, when analysed, will be seen to be strictly related to the author's main thesis.

In respect to the creation of monopolies the shafts of the author's satire are most keenly barbed. Bernick, being interested in a cargo and passenger steamboat service, resists and defeats a project for a railway along the coast. But he forwards a scheme whereby a railway may be brought in by an inland route, and, meanwhile, secretly buys or obtains options of purchase upon mining and forest lands contiguous to the proposed line, the owners being kept in ignorance of the enterprise which is soon to transform the face of the country. The design of Bernick throughout is to gain a maximum of advantage to himself (with relatively small shares to a group of necessary accomplices), but through it all to persuade the public that *their* good is his primary consideration. His methods are the methods of concealment and misrepresentation. And so far as those methods succeed the power of the community to think for itself, and to take such action as may really be best for its own welfare is restricted, its liberty is limited, and the spirits of Truth and Freedom, which are the Pillars of Society, are enfeebled.

Chapter IV

Plays of Social Life—(*continued*)

Views of Marriage and Family Life—Wrong Training of Women—Deceit as a Weapon of the Weak—False Self-assertion—The Price of Social Blunders—"A Doll's House."

IF the spirits of Truth and Freedom are the Pillars of Society, it is in the relations of men and women, especially as represented in marriage and in the life of the family, that they first must be established. In nothing is it more necessary that Truth and Freedom should prevail than in those relations. It may be assumed from the treatment of the character of Lona in "Pillars of Society" that woman's claim to economic and social independence, and in general to more full development and a greater exercise of power in the practical affairs of life, was one of the many problems now engaging Ibsen's attention. "It is you women," exclaims Bernick at the end of the play, "who are the pillars of society," for he feels that it is by woman's influence that he has been redeemed. But Lona, a noble pioneer of her sex, replies to him in the words upon which I have commented already: "The spirits of Truth and Freedom—these are the Pillars of Society." It was on the assertion of these qualities that Lona's influence had depended. But Ibsen well knew that he had drawn a wholly

exceptional type of woman when he drew Lona. What were the conditions that led to this type being so rare? Brooding long and earnestly upon this question, Ibsen next wrote "A Doll's House."

I regard it as evidence of the transcendent genius of Ibsen that when he applied himself to the task of writing his next play he chose a character like Nora as the central figure. His problem was to illustrate the cramping effects on woman's development of the prevalent ideas on the subject of marriage, the paramount necessity for Truth and Freedom in this most sacred relationship, and the pre-eminent right of woman to the fullest development of her individuality. An inferior dramatist, purposing to treat such a theme as this, would have given us as the central figure of his play a robust, self-poised woman, like Lona in "Pillars of Society," or one with all the moral qualities of a Griselda united to the daring of a Joan of Arc. And this woman, who no doubt would have been regarded as a heroine by the whole of her sex, would have been represented as mated to a husband who not only misunderstood her virtues, but had in himself most of the vices of the brute. Such a dramatist might even have drawn a heroine who would, in the grandest possible fashion, have reversed the rôles of Katharine and Petruchio.

But Ibsen's truth to Nature and his fine sense of psychology forbade a course such as this. He saw that the prevalent ideas on the education of women, and on marriage, involved the practical denial of freedom, and that in many cases much of the homage which men paid to women was insincere and selfish—insincere in so far as it cloaked contempt for an intellect which men in general felt to be inferior

"HENRIK IBSEN POET, MYSTIC & MORALIST"
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to their own, and selfish in so far as its object was the better to secure the companionship of the woman as a glorified plaything. In Ibsen's view there could be no reality in marriage under these conditions. Denial of freedom, insincerity and selfishness on the one side provoked corresponding vices on the other. The practice of the deceit which we politely call "artfulness" was almost universal amongst women, and petty lying and chicanery were—well, not rare. Moreover, whilst the predisposition of nearly all women was towards purity, in the restricted and false relationships in which they commonly stood towards men they had acquired a preternatural sense of the power which their sexual attraction enabled them to exercise.

These were the factors of the situation which Ibsen had before him when he drew Nora. Reared as a doll-child by her father, she had been treated as a doll-wife by her husband, who, on his part, was a quite estimable middle-class citizen. We may dismiss the more sexual aspect of the picture which Ibsen presents by observing merely that in Nora we have a woman who respects her vows of marriage to the full, but well knows the secrets of her power over her husband. To him she is indeed sincerely attached. For the sake of gaining the greater influence over him she has become a liar by habit. Fibs drop from her lips with the utmost facility, and concealment and prevarication are common features of her conduct. But her gravest delinquency of all—and it is on this that the plot of the play turns—has been an act of forgery for the purpose of raising money, partly to gratify her pride and extravagance, and partly to enable her husband to have a long holiday at the outset of their married

life, a holiday on which she persuades herself that his health depends.

The details of the plot do not here concern me. But I would like to point out that it seems to me requisite to the understanding of this play as a natural and true picture of a woman's revolt, that we should perceive that the climax which is reached in the final act, when the forgery is made known to Helmer, the husband—when he and Nora come into an acute conflict, and Nora quits his roof, with the descent of the curtain whilst we hear the slamming of the outer door—does not in reality mark the period when Nora first conceives the idea of taking her own course, and of asserting her right to individuality and freedom. We may reasonably infer that Nora has been revolving this idea in her mind before ever the curtain rose even on Act I of the play; it is probable that when we see her in the earlier scenes her mind is already almost made up.

Of the fact that it is present to her thought that the need to quit her husband's roof may arise there is actual evidence in the second act. At the beginning of this act she remarks to the nurse Anna that she cannot have her children so much with her in future. The nurse consolingly answers, "Well, little children get used to anything." In response Nora says, "Do you think so? Do you believe that they would forget their mother if she went quite away?"

It is just because the treatment which she has all along received has made her, like most members of her sex, a clever actress in real life, that her growing purpose has been so well concealed. Of the moral delinquency of the forgery she is scarcely sensible, owing partly to the limitations of her training, and

partly to her belief that purely generous motives had impelled her to the commission of this offence. But she is dimly conscious that her husband, on his part, may take a serious view of her conduct. If, taking that view, he yet should be ready to sacrifice himself on her behalf, though she would not accept such a sacrifice, she would regard the offer of it as proof of his real nobility, and strive to work out her redemption under his roof. But this, to use her own term, is a "miracle" for which she scarcely hopes.

(That Nora should have conceived it as, at any rate, possible that her husband would seriously contemplate, or even offer to take on himself the responsibility for a crime of which he was all along innocent, and of which he was ignorant until he learned the truth, not from Nora, but, in despite of Nora, from a man whom he had reason to detest, indicates that her moral perceptions and her reasoning powers alike were very greatly at fault.) It is not the purpose of the author that we should think them otherwise. We are not even to suppose that in the manner in which, finally, she seeks to solve her difficulties, he is holding her up for our admiration.

It is one consequence of the wrong training of women as a class that in numerous cases their moral perceptions and power of judgment, and their power to act with wisdom in great crises are partly destroyed or remain undeveloped. Nora, in this play, acts precisely as a woman of her type would act in like circumstances. If the event should prove that she was wrong in the decision which she came to and on which she acted, if it should be found that real harm was done by it to her husband and children, and that she herself even missed the goal

after which she was striving—well, all these things are part of the price which Society is paying for its blunders.

On the wisdom and possible effects of Nora's action I shall have something to say later on. Ibsen did not give us a play containing a sequel to "A Doll's House." But he did give us other plays from which we may infer that whatever form the sequel would have taken, it would not have given support to the view that problems such as are presented in "A Doll's House" can be solved by the breaking of contracts, the evasion of obligations, the cutting of knots, or any expedients of that kind. But further reference to this point had better be deferred until these plays are reached.

Chapter V

Plays of Social Life—(*continued*)

The Sins of the Fathers—Significance of the Doctrine of Heredity—Homogeneity of Humanity—Insurance against Social Disorder—Heroism of Ibsen—"Ghosts."

THE visitation of the sins of the fathers upon the children, even to the third and the fourth generation, is, to some minds, one of the perplexing problems of life, though a problem which wears a less formidable aspect when the operation of the law of compensation is perceived—when it is recognised that the virtues also of the fathers are in like manner visited on the children. The truth of the matter obviously is that these conditions, whether of good or of evil, result inevitably from the homogeneity of Humanity. The present is linked with the past; all who now live are linked with one another. And we, in turn, modify and transmit those conditions which, for better or worse, must have their continuing influence on those who follow us.

It is the appreciation of these quite elementary facts which invests the doctrine of heredity with such tremendous and far-reaching significance. And it was impossible that a mind so searching and analytical as was that of Ibsen could long dwell on the subject of marriage without this problem of the hereditary transmission of qualities—physical,

mental and moral—pressing itself upon his attention. We have signs in some of the plays which he had written already that it had been doing so, and especially do we find them in “A Doll’s House,” in the pictures which he gives of the characters of Nora and, more notably, of Dr. Rank—Dr. Rank, who suffers from incurable disease and remarks that his poor innocent spine must do penance for his father’s wild oats, and who, when we hear of him last, has left his visiting-card in the letter-box of the Helmers with a black cross against his name, as a sign that henceforth he is going to shut himself up at home—that he has decided to creep into his lair like a wounded animal, and there die.

It is in this uncanny way that Rank disappears from “A Doll’s House.” But the special, because the most acute and far-reaching aspect of the problem of heredity which Rank stood for was now for a time to absorb the attention of Ibsen. And the result was seen in the writing of “Ghosts.”

Perhaps in all the records of the hero as man of letters there is no more remarkable example of heroism than was the writing of “Ghosts” by Ibsen. Here was a dramatist who was reaching the zenith of his popularity, who had won fame, and might reasonably regard himself as on the way to fortune. And yet with full knowledge that he was dealing with a subject that was intensely unpleasant in itself—by its nature unsuited for popular dramatic treatment, and sure to be tabooed in almost every theatre in the civilised world, he devoted to this subject the finest powers of his intellect, the fullest resources of his art.

I have already remarked upon the peculiarly practical mind of Ibsen. I have not the faintest

doubt that though he may not fully have estimated the bitterness of the criticism which he was to encounter when this play was issued, he well knew that contumely awaited his work. That under these circumstances he engaged in it and carried it through with so much thoroughness is to be explained only on the theory that the view which he took of his duty as a teacher overmastered his regard for merely personal interests and even his instincts as an artist. It is self-evident that plays fail of their primary aim if they are not acted, or can only be acted under rare and excessively restricted conditions. It follows that the man who consciously writes a play of which this fate may be predicted is either making an artistic blunder, or a deliberate sacrifice for the sake of expressing himself in a medium which he feels to be properly his own. [In my belief Ibsen acted with open eyes ; he chose to make the sacrifice ; for he felt that he had a message to deliver.]

The first object of this message was to enforce the importance of that doctrine of heredity to which I have referred. What further he aimed at may the better be discerned if we examine into the incidents connected with the destruction of the orphanage—amongst the most powerful incidents of the play. In these incidents Ibsen provides in symbolic form a practical comment on the situation with which the play deals. Pastor Manders advises that the orphanage, which has been built as a memorial to the late Captain Alving, should not be insured, for, as he explains to Mrs. Alving, “ people would only be too ready to interpret our action as a sign that neither you nor I had the right faith in a Higher Providence.” Yet the carelessness

or want of thought of the pastor himself in the trimming of a candle—snuffing the wick with his fingers and throwing the smouldering material where it comes in contact with some dry shavings which still remain in the just-completed building—is the cause of the orphanage being destroyed before ever it is opened.

To Ibsen it appeared that a trust in Providence which neglected a sensible and practical provision against natural perils was neither logical nor pious. And it seemed to him that against the destructive conflagrations of human passion no wise insurance was being made in the present conditions of human society. We hear "the joy of life" again spoken of in this play, and though the words are put into the mouth of young Alving, already doomed for his father's sins, there are many indications in the work that Ibsen regarded orderly provision for the satisfaction of natural instincts as a primary form of insurance against disorder—thus bringing us face to face with many questions which now are seen to be economic and social as well as religious.

Then, too, it behoves us to realise that in this matter Truth and Freedom are also essential forms of insurance. We do not banish evils by affecting to believe that they do not exist. Nor do we avoid them by imposing fetters of convention on the nature of the choice which a woman of fine sensibility and right purpose like Mrs. Alving would make, in the search for a life-companion, if freedom of choice were open to her. Mrs. Alving in her mating had not been quite a free agent. And for this Pastor Manders was not without responsibility.

There is much that is pathetic as well as ludicrous in the simple faith of Pastor Manders that apparent

compliance with his own standards of morality and order is evidence of real compliance. He is all too readily satisfied that by preserving outward appearances of good we provide a matrix, so to speak, in which character may be formed, and therefore, that outward appearances are precious.

It is very much because of the importance which he attaches to outward appearances that Pastor Manders is so easily imposed upon by others, and so easily imposes on himself. His unwillingness to look facts straight in the face and to reason about them in a logical way is fatal. With the best intentions he blunders egregiously. His attitude towards Society is akin to his attitude towards the orphanage—which, even from motives which he believed to be religious, but which were really stupid and false, he would not insure.

Naturally, the dove-cotes of convention were terribly fluttered by Ibsen's "Ghosts," and not least by the typical portrait which he drew in Pastor Manders. But it was Ibsen's purpose that they should be fluttered. His play remains a play chiefly for the study, and, in my opinion, is not likely to be much acted at any time. But its influence in stimulating thought on the problem with which it deals has been great. And though, as long as this play is read, there may be critics who will declare that to write such a work was a shocking violation of delicacy and good taste, the final verdict of the best minds probably will accord with the judgment of Dr. Brandes when the play was first published, which verdict, in effect, was that "Ghosts" might or might not be Ibsen's greatest work, but that it was certainly his noblest deed.

Chapter VI

Plays of Social Life—(*continued*)

“ An Enemy of the People ”—A Piece of Self-revelation—
Where there is no Vision—Martyrdom of the Wise
—Doctrine of the Compact Majority.

THAT the reception which “ Ghosts ” met with was even more hostile than Ibsen had anticipated is a matter of history. His indignation is seen in letters which he wrote at the time, and, most of all, in his next play, “ An Enemy of the People.”

In a Society which is rotten to the core men readily impose upon others by false pretences of honesty and of devotion to the public interest, and the lot of the man who is truly honest is made doubly hard. In “ Pillars of Society ” Ibsen had shown how one man may act falsely towards the community and yet be viewed as a benefactor. He was now to show how one man may act towards his fellows with the most perfect honesty—warning them, as he had done himself in “ Ghosts,” of deadly evils in their midst, and pointing to needful remedies—and yet be denounced and persecuted.

In “ An Enemy of the People ” Ibsen stepped forth on his own admission as Dr. Stockman, though with certain differences. On September 9th, 1882, he wrote to Hegel :

" I have enjoyed writing this piece, and I feel quite lost and lonely now that it is out of hand. Dr. Stockman and I got on very excellently together ; we agree on so many subjects. But the doctor is a more muddle-headed person than I am, and he has, moreover, several other characteristics because of which people will stand a good many things from him which they might perhaps not have taken in such very good part had they been said by me."

Ibsen no doubt felt that had he uttered his thoughts on all points publicly in his own proper person he must have spoken in the fiery tones of a Jeremiah and without the innate gentleness of a Stockman. He might in the then conditions have been less listened to and more persecuted than he represents Stockman to have been. Placing his ideas before the public in the dramatic form, and with some softening of the character of which he was himself the prototype, he was the better able to gain a hearing.

The censure of his own age which is implied in Ibsen's treatment of his theme will be seen to have been all the greater when it is realised that he represents the persecution as directed against a man who is amiable and generous, free from all ambition and self-seeking, and ready to bear the burdens of others, and, moreover, peace-loving to a high degree—a virtue to which Ibsen could not well make claim, for his nature was eminently combative.

As to how far Ibsen's reference to Dr. Stockman as " muddle-headed " should be taken seriously or literally opinions may differ. In my view, when Ibsen drew the character of Stockman he aimed to represent a man who was entirely rational and who was at the same time, in the highest and best sense, simple and innocent, and to show what must inevitably happen in a corrupt society when such a

man attempts to assert himself, and to proclaim the truth. "Where there is no vision the people perish." If it is bad for a community to be ruled by impostors, by men of selfish aims, who cannot see that which is really best, not alone for others, but even for themselves, and who are ever ready to cozen and betray for the attainment of their own ends, it is doubly bad for a community to be blind to the virtues of men who would lead them aright, if but the chance were given. And only by a reverent regard for truth in all human relationships can a people be preserved from either of those evils.

It is in consonance with the general state of corruption which he depicts that Ibsen makes the action turn so largely on the question of the provision of a pure water supply. Just as in the play "Ghosts" a feature of symbolism was introduced, in the uninsured orphanage which was burnt to the ground, so here we have a symbolic feature, though of a much less subtle kind, in Dr. Stockman's discovery that the baths on which the prosperity of the community amongst whom the scene is laid depends, are being supplied with water that is polluted, and is dangerous even for bathing, and still more for drinking.

The corruption of the people against whom the censure of Ibsen was directed could not possibly be figured in a more damning way than by representing them as the persecutors of the man whose one aim was to secure for them for their own use, and for the use of the visitors whose presence is so essential to the growth of this watering-place, not only a supply of the health-giving and purifying medium, but the avoidance of the supply even then being received of water in which

the agents of disease and death were plentifully borne.

Central points in "An Enemy of the People" are Ibsen's attack on what he calls "the compact majority," and his assertion of the doctrine that "the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone."

It is no injustice to Ibsen to say that in the bitterness of the indignation which he felt at this time against his many enemies, and especially against what he describes as "the so-called Liberal Press" of his own country, and those for whom it spoke, he was driven to the over-accentuation of the doctrine which he so honestly held as to the evils of Party and the necessity of individual action.

Had Ibsen been content to express himself solely through the medium of his play we might not have felt this so much, but since he insisted on dotting the i's and crossing the t's by statements in private letters, some little examination of his attitude on this subject is desirable. The basis of his teaching was right, but the over-accentuation of a doctrine which is right in itself may lead to error unless it is rightly considered.

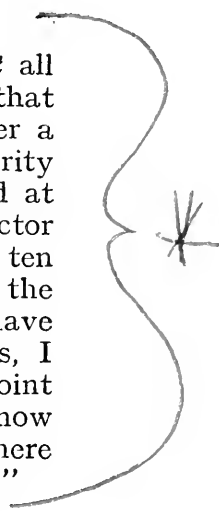
It is in the words which Ibsen puts into the mouth of Dr. Stockman, in the fourth act, that the author's position is defined chiefly. In the course of the harangue which he delivers, amidst constant interruption, and in defiance of incessant vituperation, Stockman exclaims :

"The most dangerous foe to truth and freedom in our midst is the compact majority. Yes, it's the confounded, compact, Liberal majority—that, and nothing else. . . . It's this very majority that robs me of my freedom, and

wants to forbid me to speak the truth. . . . The majority never has right on its side. Never, I say ! That is one of the social lies that a free, thinking man is bound to rebel against. Who make up the majority in any given country ? Is it the wise men or the fools ? I think we must agree that the fools are in a terrible, overwhelming majority all the world over. But how in the devil's name can it ever be right for the fools to rule over the wise men ? . . . The masses are nothing but the raw material that must be fashioned into a people."

Much more in the same vein does Stockman utter. And that Ibsen is all the while expressing, in however exaggerated a form, convictions of his own is evident from a letter quoted by Mr. Archer, in his introduction to the play, a letter written by Ibsen to Dr. Brandes, six months after the play appeared. In this letter Ibsen says :

" You are, of course, right in urging that we *must* all work for the spread of our opinions. But I maintain that a fighter at the intellectual outposts can never gather a majority around him. In ten years, perhaps, the majority may occupy the standpoint which Dr. Stockman held at the public meeting. But during these ten years the Doctor will not have been standing still ; he will be at least ten years ahead of the majority. The majority, the mass, the multitude can never overtake him ; he can never have the majority with him. As for myself, at all events, I am conscious of this incessant progression. At the point where I stood when I wrote each of my books there now stands a fairly compact multitude ; but I myself am there no longer ; I am elsewhere, and, I hope, farther ahead."



All this is not only finely expressed ; it is substantially right. Yet the large element of truth which these statements of Ibsen, both in the play and the above letter, contain, and the literary and dramatic power with which it is expressed, must not be allowed to obscure our judgment as to the actual

purport of the statements. Especially must we guard against being misled as to their practical application to the work of human government.

"The majority never has right on its side," exclaims Dr. Stockman—meaning "is never in the right." Standing by itself, this is an incredible statement. But when we read the letter to Dr. Brandes we see that all that Ibsen meant by it was that the majority can never be so completely right as the minority, even though that minority consists of only one man—provided that man be the most right-minded amongst them. This is an obvious truism. In the evolution of Society some individuals must be before the rest. But it does not follow that the rest are always wrong, or, to use Dr. Stockman's words, that the majority "never has right on its side." It is simply a question of the relative positions of the leaders, or possible leaders, and the mass.

In all wise human government the problem is to find the equation between the ideals of the best minds and the possible development of those ideals in the life of the community at large. The fact that the leader is ten years ahead of the majority no more proves that the majority is wrong than it proves that the leader himself was wrong ten years ago. If the process is evolutionary, no stage that is proper to the evolutionary process can possibly be wrong at all.

Though it may be true that in certain conditions the state of a community may be evil, so evil as not only to hinder the process of social evolution, but even to be destructive of the vital forces on which progress depends, this does not invalidate the main argument. Such conditions do not always

and everywhere prevail. Had they always and everywhere prevailed the human race would have been wiped out long ago.

It would be unjust to Ibsen to suppose that he was not quite sensible of these aspects of the problem. Neither should we imagine that he would have wished us to take, with no sort of qualification, the final dictum of Dr. Stockman: "The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone." A man is strong in proportion to his capacity to stand alone. But be his strength what it may, there is no man who is not all the stronger in proportion to his power to possess the co-operation of his fellows. Human life is social as well as individual. No one knew this better than Ibsen. His best work was done to enforce this very doctrine. Clearly then, in a practical consideration of the teaching of Ibsen at this time, we must bear in mind that his harder sayings, like those of every other teacher, should be read in the light of his teaching as a whole.

Chapter VII

Plays of Social Life—(*continued*)

“The Wild Duck”—Unpractical Idealism—Tampering with Souls—Weighing of Motives—Evil of Rash Judgments—The True Way of Advancement—Evolution and Revolution.

IN his introduction to “An Enemy of the People,” Mr. Archer says that on December 19th, 1879, a fortnight after the publication of “A Doll’s House,” Ibsen wrote to Professor Dietrichson: “It appears to me doubtful whether better artistic conditions can be attained in Norway before the intellectual soil has been thoroughly turned up and cleansed, and all the swamps drained off.” On this Mr. Archer remarks: “Here we have clearly the germ of ‘An Enemy of the People.’ The image so took hold of Ibsen that after applying it to social life in this play, he recurred to it in ‘The Wild Duck,’ in relation to the individual life.”

If to this explanation of the genesis of Ibsen’s work at this time we add the recognition that it was not merely an intellectual problem which presented itself to his mind, but also, and even in a greater measure, a moral problem, we may agree with Mr. Archer.

In the introduction to “The Wild Duck” itself, which is the play that immediately followed “An

Enemy of the People," Mr. Archer further accounts for "The Wild Duck" by saying :

"There can be no doubt that 'The Wild Duck' marks a reaction in the poet's mood, following upon the eager vivacity wherewith, in 'An Enemy of the People,' he had flung defiance at the 'compact Liberal majority,' which, as the reception of 'Ghosts' had proved, could not endure to be told the truth. Having said his say and liberated his soul, he now began to ask himself whether human nature was, after all, capable of assimilating the strong meat of truth—whether illusion might not be, for the average man, the only thing that could make life livable."

Having set forth this extremely interesting theory, Mr. Archer admits that it would be too much to say that the play gives a generally affirmative answer to the question named. He discerns that, on the contrary, its last lines express pretty clearly the poet's firm conviction that if life cannot reconcile itself with truth, then life may as well go to the wall. Nevertheless, says Mr. Archer, Ibsen's very devotion to truth forces him to realise that truth is an antitoxin which, rashly injected, at wrong times or in wrong doses, may produce disastrous results. It ought not to be indiscriminately administered by "quacksalvers."

Undoubtedly this is a very penetrating and helpful piece of criticism, which adds much to the debt which students of Ibsen must feel to Mr. Archer. But it seems to me that this criticism, excellent though it be, does not quite cover the whole of the ground.

In "The Wild Duck" Ibsen is not merely concerned to warn us, as does Robert Browning in many parts of his works, against injudicious or fanatical tampering with the souls of men—in reality against pressing the claims of the ideal in a revolutionary

rather than an evolutionary fashion. (He is desirous also to illustrate, in as convincing a way as he can, the peculiar risk which the idealist runs, even more than merely commonplace folk, of misunderstanding and misjudging the motives of others.)

Ibsen well knew that there are many facets to every social problem, and having fixed our attention upon certain of these facets in plays which he had already written, he now, not strictly in a spirit of reaction, but from an honest desire to present other aspects of the question with which he was dealing, put forth the warning of "The Wild Duck."

In this play he illustrates in a peculiar degree the doctrine, "Judge not, that ye be not judged"; we must not allow our devotion to our ideal to obscure our judgment of the motives and actions of others, since, if we do, the facts of life may, in the long run, prove that we have been not only foolish in so doing, but also mischievous.

We learn that a big act of fraud had at some past time been committed against the Government, in respect to a forestry contract. By this act the elder Werle presumably gained much wealth. The fraud was really instigated and apparently to a large extent it was carried out by Werle, but he had managed to fix the guilt on the elder Ekdal, a scapegrace associate in the business enterprise. Ekdal had been imprisoned, and, of course, was socially and financially ruined. The career of his son, Hialmar, had been blighted as a consequence of the father's misfortune.

The elder Werle had added infidelity to his other crimes; the child that Hialmar has reared as his own, the sweet and much-injured Hedvig, is really the child of the elder Werle. We have that suggested

to us in the fact that early in the play she is described as likely to become blind. Later in the play we learn that the elder Werle is actually going blind; for the author here is working upon the doctrine of heredity, which has so large a place in his philosophy.

Yes, there is every proof that the life of the elder Werle had been full of iniquity in the past. But one thing about which we may have doubt is as to where precisely he stands now. We may note that with many evidences around him of the former evil of his life he is minimising the effects of that evil as far as he can—not, indeed, as an idealist would have him do, by open confession and large reparation, but just in the way that, from his training as a hard-headed man of business, seems to him the most practical.

His housekeeper, Mrs. Sorby, whom he is going to marry, has also had a past. But the relations of this curious pair towards one another are open and frank. Towards one another they have actually practised that regard for truth which the younger Werle, Gregers Werle, declares to be necessary if the claims of the ideal are to be satisfied.

Thus we get an altogether strange situation which confounds and confuses the merely idealist calculations of the younger Werle, who wants to put everything right in a fashion of his own. It is left to us to infer that the offences of the elder Werle and of Mrs. Sorby, though of those of the latter we have only the merest hints, have become, so to speak, remote and external in their characters, or are, at any rate, in a fair way to be so. Their real selves are to be seen in their present ways of life, which, apparently, are orderly and loyal.

Much of the mischief which arises, ending in the breaking-up of the domestic peace of Hialmar Ekdal, and the suicide of the unhappy Hedvig—conscious that now she is “in the way,” and anxious to prove her love to the man who has cherished her as his daughter—is due to the over-zeal and want of judgment of the younger Werle, and most of all to his inability rightly to appraise the present position of his father.

Thus do the motives of this play appear to me. And, therefore, I conceive that it was to plead for all-round views of human conduct, and for a larger charity, that Ibsen wrote “The Wild Duck.” As I have stated, the work does not represent strictly a reaction from his previous position, but an extension of view which was intended to assist in bringing out the truth more fully.

Though it is not a matter of the first importance, it may, in passing, be observed that the title “The Wild Duck” is very happily chosen. The duck, which is the chief pet of old Ekdal, and is kept with his pigeons, rabbits, and other small deer in his garret, is the symbol of souls that are wounded, cabined, and confined. Its symbolism corresponds chiefly with the spiritual and actual state of the old man himself, but sometimes it is also symbolic of the state of the son Hialmar, and sometimes of that of Hedvig.

We feel the uncanny significance of old Ekdal’s pet bird all the more when we learn that it had been caught through being shot at and wounded by the elder Werle. “She was hit under the wing, so that she couldn’t fly.” She had then dived to the bottom. As to this incident, old Ekdal says: “Always do that, wild ducks do. They shoot to the bottom as

deep as they can get, sir—and bite themselves fast in the tangle and seaweed—and all the devil's own mess that grows down there. And they never come up again."

But the duck which Ekdal had in his garret *had* come up again, or rather it had been brought up. The elder Werle had an amazingly clever dog, which dived in and fetched her up.

And what this dog had been to the wild duck, the younger Werle, with his claim of the "ideal," wants to be for old Ekdal and his family. In the contemplation of his mission the duck becomes for him an expressive symbol, on which he loves to dwell. But he misses the significance of the fact that not only is the wing of this wild duck maimed—the wing that had been struck by the shot—but that one of its feet is maimed also. This was the foot by which the dog took hold of her. By pressing the claim of the ideal with more zeal than judgment, young Werle is fated to work even greater injury than the clever dog had done. Whilst his methods involve the maiming of some who are unfortunate already, they lead to the death of one of them.

It is all very grim. And we may admit that after our best powers of analysis have been used the work remains, in some of its aspects, perplexing. Yet we cannot doubt the soundness of the main deductions at which we arrive. There can be no real progress, no true happiness, until life is reconciled with truth. Yet, in the practical application of this belief, we must not forbid a wise conservatism; "Evolution, not revolution," must be our motto, and against the egoism which impels us to misjudge, or too severely judge the motives of others, and against uncalculating zeal to give effect to our own

convictions we must especially guard. These doctrines are, in my belief, plainly enforced in "The Wild Duck"; the more perplexing features of the work to which I have made reference may be due merely to Ibsen's inability to give to his ideas a perfect expression.

Through the whole of the play we may see how profoundly Ibsen was impressed by the social not less than the individual conception of life. I have referred to the letter of Ibsen to Professor Dietrichson, in which he wrote of the need for "draining the swamps," and to Mr. Archer's comment that the image so took hold of Ibsen's mind that after applying it to social life in "An Enemy of the People," he recurred to it in "The Wild Duck" in relation to the individual life. However true this may be as a comment on the manner of Ibsen's work at this time, we must not ignore the fact that in Ibsen's thought individual and social life are never really separated. The intense consciousness that the individual can never be isolated from the apparently dead past, and from the living forces of the present is, as I have suggested, one of his most distinctive features as a teacher. No man has had this feeling more strongly than he had, and none has been more influenced by it. This may be seen in "The Wild Duck" quite as much as in "An Enemy of the People." In the one case the plot is concerned with private life, in the other with public life. But the social idea is in both.

Chapter VIII

Plays of Social Life—(*continued*)

Fidelity to Contracts—Pursuit of Ideals in Despite of Present Duty—Limit to the Right to Live One's own Life—Doctrine of Social Responsibility—"Rosmersholm."

WHEN "A Doll's House" was first produced many critics and commentators came to the conclusion that the intention of Ibsen was to present for our admiration a type of what was called "the new woman," that he wished us to regard Nora as a heroine, a pioneer in a revolt of her sex against inequality and injustice—and as being not only courageous in purpose, but wise in action. This is a view which is still held very generally. Hence scenes from "A Doll's House" are included very often in entertainments which are given under the auspices of the advocates of Votes for Women!

In my analysis of this play I suggested reasons for coming to a more judicial conclusion with respect to Nora's conduct than that which is generally adopted. And, having in mind more especially the conduct of Nora in quitting her husband's roof, I remarked that whilst Ibsen did not give us a play containing a sequel to "A Doll's House," he did give us other plays from which we may infer that whatever form such a sequel, if it had been written, would have taken, it would not

have given support to the view that problems such as are presented in "A Doll's House," can be solved by the breaking of contracts, the evasion of obligations, or by any expedients of that kind.

The chief of these plays was the one which he was now to write, "Rosmersholm." It is on the slow undermining of a husband's attachment, through the pursuit of an ideal of freedom and self-expression—surely the ideals of Nora—that the whole action of "Rosmersholm" is made to turn. The sense of duty of the ex-pastor, Rosmer, towards his wife, Beata, is seen to have been relaxed from this cause. And, co-incidentally, as is but natural, a new attachment has been formed.

As if to give the greater force to the teaching which underlies his work Ibsen represents Rosmer as childless; Rosmer has no hindering obligations corresponding with those of Nora to her children. On the other hand, he is subject to a temptation from which, so long at any rate as she remains under her husband's roof, Nora is free. Rebecca West, who displaces the wife in the affections of Rosmer, is, in the beginning at least, and through most of her career, not less an idealist than Rosmer himself. There is no such "kindred soul" in Nora's home circle, whose presence might stimulate and appear to justify *her* revolt.

All the art of the dramatist is definitely used to make the course of action taken by Rosmer seem natural, easy, and explicable. And be it noted that the author is careful to give us a high sense of the innate nobility of Rosmer. No suggestion is made by the dramatist that the relations of Rosmer and Rebecca West are, during the lifetime of the wife, otherwise than Platonic.

Truly if any man could have the excuse to assume a right to live his own life irrespective of the obligations to which he has already been a party, it is a man in the position of Rosmer. Yet if this play means anything, it means that a right thus freed from limitation does not exist, and that the attempt to act on the assumption that it does exist is inevitably fraught with serious evil. Rosmer, who has elected to live his own life, and whilst still preserving feelings of tenderness and respect for Beata has, in obedience to the dictates of his ideal, joined himself in spiritual marriage with Rebecca, finds that his grip on his ideal becomes more and more relaxed. So great is the spiritual disorder which the new state of things brings about that the wife, half demented from the feeling that she has lost the affections of her husband, and that she is "in the way," and, moreover, half hypnotised by Rebecca, whose own idealism is not proof against the temptation to have Rosmer wholly as her own, throws herself from a bridge into a mill-race, and so perishes.

It is a poor outcome of an idealist's attempt to live his own life. But the tragedy has not yet ended ; it has just begun. Were it in the scheme of the universe that there should be recuperative, abiding, and vital power in ideals, however noble, when those ideals can only be pursued by ignoring present duties, surely that power would assert itself when the obstacle which originally existed had passed away. But it was not thus that the laws of life presented themselves to the dramatist. Rosmer believes, and Rebecca makes the most pathetic efforts to support him in the belief, that his ideals may be realised. Yet both Rosmer and Rebecca

are confused and confounded at every turn. Beata, though dead, becomes a greater obstacle to the real union of Rosmer and Rebecca than she was when alive. The two become the prey to self-reproach and remorse, until, in the end, they adjudge themselves so guilty that it appears that but one means of expiation remains—that they should follow the wife into the mill-race. This they do together. Thus it is that the tragedy ends.

The need for truthfulness in all human relations ; for the practice of wisdom in entering into contracts, and especially in respect to the most important and solemn of all contracts, marriage, together with fidelity to contracts when made, I have pointed to as leading doctrines of Ibsen. Obviously these doctrines—which, as I have gone out of my way to emphasise, have a vital bearing on the interpretation which should be put on “A Doll’s House”—are enforced with special definiteness in “Rosmersholm.”

Nor were the other doctrines to which I have alluded as foremost in the social teaching of Ibsen, less regarded in this work. In particular, the doctrine of the social responsibility of each individual member of the community—a doctrine which, rightly considered, includes all the rest—stands out prominently. We see this not only in the episodes of private life which are exposed to our view, but in the lurid sketch which Ibsen gives of the party-political conflicts which provide much of the background of the play. The private ambitions, the love of personal power and of victory for its own sake rather than for the sake of truth and of the well-being of the community, the opportunism and the expediency, and the positive dishonesty

of much of the political strife which attends all efforts at public or political advancement—against all these things does Ibsen direct his satire. The corrupt journalism which men with sufficiently long purses could command, and which, as he believed, fostered and gave expression to these evils, was especially a subject of his wrath. “What are the extension of freedom of thought and freedom of speech worth?” he seems to ask, “unless they are a means of further security to individual rights, and at the same time of promoting social union and co-operation. Without nobility of will, of soul, of character—guiding the action of the individual and the community alike—there can be no guarantee for permanent advancement.”

Whilst the real tragedy of “Rosmersholm” centres in the fate of two or three individuals, the plot is so skilfully devised that all these doctrines are included and expressed. Nor are Ibsen’s views upon parental responsibility, on the importance of heredity in its influence on character, left out of the picture. “The hereditary idea of the house of Rosmer,” which had existed for many generations and on the whole made for a wise conservatism, is alluded to, as is also “the Rosmer view of life,” a view which, says Rebecca, “ennobles.” And we are led to infer that the fact that Rebecca West is an illegitimate daughter of the old doctor by whom she was reared accounts for certain features of her character which conduce to the tragedy that is depicted.

Obviously, most of the social teaching of Ibsen is summed up and expressed in “Rosmersholm.” I may point out, however, that in this play Ibsen incidentally puts this teaching in an even briefer form

than is indicated in the description which I have given.

It would almost seem that when at last Ibsen surveyed the whole field of investigation to which for some years his attention had been directed, he came to a conclusion similar to that so well expressed by Swedenborg in his famous aphorism, "All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good," in other words, that to be good and to do good is the whole duty of man. But the precise form in which Ibsen put this doctrine is that the happiness, the salvation of man, lies in being innocent and at the same time useful.

"Happiness," exclaims Rosmer to Rebecca, when in Act III the consciousness of guilt and of failure grows upon him, "Happiness is, above all things, the calm, glad certainty of innocence." "No cause ever triumphs that has its origin in sin," he later on declares. And in the final act, as the tragedy is drawing to its terrible close, Rebecca, who is even more conscience-stricken than Rosmer, for her guilt is greater, cries out to her distraught companion, "And innocence? Where am I to get that from? . . . That is the source of peace and happiness. That was the vital truth you were to implant in the coming generation of happy, noble men."

Invariably it is self-will, the belief that one can live one's own life without reference to the equal right of others to similar fullness of self-expression, that is the prime cause of mischief in human affairs.

But let the reader observe with what fineness of vision Ibsen connects the loss of power for usefulness with loss of innocence. And let him observe the further fact that the dramatist makes the power

to be useful depend not alone on innocence, but also on the bringing of this power into active exercise.

This is to be seen not merely in the career of Rosmer, but in that of the ex-tutor, Ulric Brendel. This man is indeed a pathetic figure. He is one of those people of whom it may be said, "He is the enemy of no man but himself." His faults, which are many, are of the negative sort. Originally he has been a man of fine endowments, but all his powers have become effete from want of use. And they have not been used because he has never realised the duty of human service. This is the description which he gives of himself in his interview with Rosmer: "You know, my Johannes, that I am a bit of a Sybarite—a *Feinschmecher*. I have been so all my days. I like to take my pleasures in solitude; for then I enjoy them doubly—tenfold. So, you see, when golden dreams descended and enwrapped me—when new, dizzy, far-reaching thoughts were born in me, and wafted me aloft on their sustaining pinions—I bodied them forth in poems, visions, pictures—in the rough as it were."

"But have you written down nothing?" Rosmer asks. "Not a word," Brendel replies. "The soulless toil of the scrivener has always aroused a sickening aversion in me. And, besides, why should I profane my own ideals, when I could enjoy them in their purity by myself?"

But in times when great public movements are in progress the most self-centred, like the least impassioned men are apt to be affected by the general enthusiasm, and to be drawn into the current of one or other of the streams of conviction or opinion. This is illustrated in the case of Brendel. "I am about to take hold of life," he says, "with

a strong hand ; to step forth ; to assert myself. We live in a tempestuous, an equinoctial age—I am about to lay my mite on the altar of Emancipation.”

What the sequel was we well know. When the now bibulous and ne’er-do-well Brendel, who has even borrowed money, and accepted cast-off clothing from Rosmer, in order to make a tolerable public appearance, steps on to the platform to address an eager assemblage, he finds that his wealth of ideas has deserted him, that he can no longer command thought or speech. When, afterwards, Rebecca asks: “Have you delivered your lecture?” Brendel replies: “No, seductive lady. What do you think? Just as I am standing ready to pour forth the horn of plenty, I make the painful discovery that I am bankrupt.” “But all your unwritten work——?” says Rebecca interrogatively. And Brendel answers: “For five-and-twenty years I have sat like a miser on his double-locked treasure-chest. And then, yesterday—when I open it and want to display the treasure—there’s none there! The teeth of time had ground it into dust. There was nix and nothing in the whole concern.”

A fine parable truly. Well does it help to complete the moral of the play. Innocence and the active love of being useful—these are necessary conditions of power to make progress in the attainment of any true ideal.

Chapter IX

Psychological Plays

Problems of Psychology—"The Lady from the Sea"—
Deepening of Spiritual Insight in Ibsen—Supernatural,
Mystical, and Symbolical Qualities.

WE now come to the latest phase in the development of the genius of Ibsen. This phase ranges from 1888 to 1894. During this time the plays which he produced were four in number—"The Lady from the Sea," "Hedda Gabler," "The Master Builder," and "Little Eyolf." After the year last named he wrote two more plays—"John Gabriel Borkman" (1896) and "When we Dead Awaken" (1899), of which I shall in due course speak. But these do not represent a phase of development; they are in many respects echoes, though at times powerful echoes, of previous work. In some respects they bear evidence of declining powers.

I have pointed out that whilst we may rightly divide the work of Ibsen by periods—the period in which he aimed at "interestingness," relying for the most part on the drama of history, but sometimes on the drama of modern life; the period in which he was dominated by religious ideas, the period in which history and religion were combined, and the period in which his plays related more definitely to social problems—all these various

periods in some measure overlapped. In the latest phase of his development Ibsen devoted himself to problems of psychology. But, undoubtedly, this period was anticipated in much of the work which he had done already, just as what I have spoken of as the social period is continued—or the ideas that mainly belong to it are made to reappear in the work which he was yet to do.

Speaking of “Rosmersholm” in his introduction to that play, Mr. Archer says :

“ Though the play belongs to the social series, it no less distinctly foreshadows the transition to the psychological series. Rosmer and Rebecca, or I am greatly mistaken, stand out from the social background much more clearly than their predecessors. At first they are concerned about political duties and social ideals ; but, as the action proceeds, all these considerations drop away from them, or recur but as remembered dreams, and they are alone with their tortured souls.”

Substantially this is true. The growing bent of Ibsen’s mind towards psychological study is very obvious, however, also in the yet earlier play, “A Wild Duck.” And Ibsen’s devotion henceforth to this class of work, a devotion which Mr. Archer views as evidence not so much of intellectual advance as of deepening spiritual insight, is also clearly anticipated even in “Brand” and “Peer Gynt.”

We can define what I have called the periods in Ibsen’s work only by noting those qualities which for the time being are dominant in that work. Occasionally, as I have indicated already, in the plays that we are about to examine social questions are dealt with. But these questions become more and more subsidiary features. It is with the psychological aspects of humanity that Ibsen here

concerns himself chiefly. With these he deals with rare insight; all the while the tendency to the supernatural and the mystical, and coincidentally to the adoption of symbolism as a means of expressing his ideas, becomes more and more marked.

As I have said, the plays of this period were: "The Lady from the Sea," "Hedda Gabler," "The Master Builder," and "Little Eyolf."

Central in "The Lady from the Sea" is the attempt to symbolise the compelling power of an ideal, to illustrate the obligations of duty, and to enforce the doctrine of freedom.

All the aspirations and yearnings of Ellida Wangel, to whom the nickname of "the Lady from the Sea" has been given by the people of the small town beside a fiord where is now her home, are connected with the boundless, the illimitable, the mysterious, fascinating and free call of that element near which her childhood and youth had been spent. Using a lesser symbol to assist to express the meaning of his greater one, Ibsen makes the young painter Ballested speak of a picture which he is painting as intended to have in it the figure of a mermaid who has strayed in from the sea and cannot find her way out again. "So she dies here by inches in the brackish water, you understand." The husband, Dr. Wangel, referring to Ellida, remarks to his friend, Arnholm: "I cannot quite make out what is the matter with her. But to get into the sea is life and happiness to her." And to Ellida herself he says: "There is not light enough for you here—the horizon is not wide enough—the air not strong and stimulating enough for you."

In the mind of Ellida this sense of the excessive

limitation of her present conditions of life, and this yearning for the attainment of an ideal which she imagines to lie outside of them, finds expression in, or is for the time being inseparable from a belief that her marriage with Dr. Wangel is not a real marriage, that she had been misled into it by Wangel's protestations of affection and the promise of a home for all the rest of her years—that she is in spirit allied to a stranger, to whom she had gone through a mysterious ceremony of betrothal before ever she met Wangel. “He took a key-ring out of his pocket, and drew off his finger a ring he used to wear. Then he took from me a little ring that I had, and these two he slipped together on the key-ring. And then he said that we two should together be wedded to the sea.” And the Stranger had thrown the rings thus joined together as far as ever he could into the deep water.

Such was the nature of the betrothal. And to Ellida “a voluntary promise is to the full as binding as a marriage.” She explains to Wangel that her marriage with him had not been truly voluntary, that she had acted under the constraint alluded to already; no act can be truly hers which is not done in perfect freedom, and with a full consciousness of responsibility.

By a fine symbolic touch the author has represented Ellida as having had her home in a lighthouse—a place of rest amidst the warring forces of nature, and a means of guidance and succour to the distressed. For we are not to suppose that the ideal of Ellida is not consistent with the softer instincts of noble womanhood. It is, indeed, through the possession of these softer instincts, allied to a subtle intuition as to the true and the right, that Ellida,

finally, is saved from a situation which threatens to become tragic.

As I have shown already, in referring to "A Doll's House," and to "Rosmersholm," it was distinctly the view of Ibsen that the pursuit of an ideal, however strongly that ideal might be cherished and however essential to our happiness the pursuit of it might seem to be, must be qualified by or subject to the performance of the present duty. Ellida is represented as feeling this more and more. And the increasing proofs which she has of the love and self-sacrifice of Dr. Wangel make it the easier for her to do so. Dr. Wangel respects her freedom of will ; in the end he attempts even to assist her in acting with a sense of unhindered responsibility, whatever the cost to himself may be. Then it is that the spell of the mysterious Stranger finally is broken. In the soul of Ellida a great but vague and undefined ideal gives place to an ideal which is still greater, and at the same time plain and practical. The choice of Ellida is made for that sphere of life which has in it the highest promise of usefulness to others.

But what of contractual obligation ? Does the play contain no feature of inconsistency here ? Did not Ibsen's theories of life require that Ellida should recognise a priority of claim towards the man with whom she is described as having first been betrothed, to whom she has been, as she makes it appear, spiritually married ?

Undoubtedly an affirmative answer must be given to these questions, though the points which thus are raised require to be treated with great discrimination.

It is to be borne in mind that Ibsen pictures the Stranger as having exercised a sort of hypnotic influence over Ellida. It is true that this in-

fluence is intermittent, and ultimately is relaxed, and also that in the end the Stranger, hardly less clearly than Dr. Wangel, indicates the desire that Ellida should act as her free will directs. But at the time of the so-called betrothal, and, indeed, for most of the time during which the Stranger obtrudes himself into her life, she is not truly a free agent. In this we have in part an explanation of the apparent incongruity of her motives of action.

So far as there is inconsistency which is not thus sufficiently explained, it is not in what may be called the argument of the play, but in the artistic form or method which is employed. The claims of the Stranger, and the power of the Stranger, really exist only in the mind of Ellida herself. As a spiritual force in her life, he is a creation of her imagination : Ellida's struggle with him is simply a struggle with her own will. The added effect of inconsistency is due to the fact—and when I mention it I point to the chief weakness of the play—that Ibsen invests with tangible shape and makes objective—gives all the character of a living person—to that which in the mind of Ellida is really subjective. Ellida does not in truth break any contract ; she simply changes the direction of her will ; the only contract that has reality in it is the one which she made with Wangel. And this she resolves to fulfil.

In the course of a comprehensive study of Ibsen's writings, and especially of the psychological plays, one feels that there were times when Ibsen set himself tasks that were too great for his powers, and that he was constrained from this cause to resort to artifice, or to the adoption of far-fetched expedients, which is indeed much the same thing, in his effort to give expression to his ideas. These expedients

are purely and simply the result of relative weakness, they are the measure of the disproportion between his aims and his achievements ; they are not in any way to be confounded with artistic falsity or trickery. So far as they are defects they are of the kind which were present to the thought of Robert Browning when he put into the mouth of the " faultless painter," Andrea del Sarto, the words :

" Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for ? "

The portrayal of the Stranger in " The Lady from the Sea " may be pointed to as an illustration of these observations. In 1906, some time after Ibsen's death, there was published in " Die Neue Rundschau " a copy of a first draft which Ibsen had prepared of this play. Referring to this draft, Mr. Archer, in his introduction to " The Lady from the Sea," suggests that the Stranger, as he was first conceived by Ibsen, is reminiscent of the Strange Passenger of " Peer Gynt." Obviously that is so. But from the way in which the Strange Passenger is pictured in " Peer Gynt," we are free to regard him as, like many of the other characters of that play, a subjective creation entirely. As I point out elsewhere,* the Strange Passenger in " Peer Gynt " is " one of those characters of the play which can hardly be accounted for unless it is assumed that they are purely subjective—have no existence outside the overwrought brain of Peer himself, though they are presented with nothing to distinguish them from the other *dramatis personæ*. . . . He is at one and the same time the voice of

* " Ibsen as a Religious Teacher," *The Contemporary Review*, June, 1908.

conscience and the messenger," an inward intimation of, "future doom."

It is unfortunate that in "The Lady from the Sea," by investing with an objective character a creation which, like the Strange Passenger of "Peer Gynt," should have been presented as subjective merely, Ibsen has introduced something of artistic confusion into the play first named. But so far as the argument is concerned, we need be under no misconception. What that argument is I have shown, I trust, with sufficient clearness.

Chapter X

Psychological Plays—(*continued*)

Ibsen's Reinforcement of his Social Teaching—"Hedda Gabler"—Subtle Portraiture—Product of a False Civilisation—Hatred of Physical Ugliness and Discomfort—Insensibility to Moral Ugliness—Capacity for Self-deception.

WRITING, on November 20th, 1890, to Count Prozor, who translated some of his plays into French, Ibsen announced the completion of a new work. This was "Hedda Gabler." To the same correspondent, on December 4th, in allusion to the fact that Gabler is Hedda's maiden name, and that he has preserved this name for her in the title of the play in preference to adopting her married name of Tesman, Ibsen says that his intention in giving the title of "Hedda Gabler" to the play was to indicate that Hedda, as a personality, is to be regarded rather as her father's daughter than as her husband's wife. And then he adds: "It was not my desire to deal in this play with so-called social problems. What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions, and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day."

This letter is of real value as an indication of the mood in which Ibsen had entered on his task. What-

ever his "desire" may have been, it was no more possible for Ibsen, at this period of his life, to get outside social problems, than it was for him to get outside his own skin. But, undoubtedly, he was entirely successful in achieving his aim as he had defined it. Whilst he refrains from raising any new questions, and is content to assume a frank admission on our part of the existence of all that falsity in human relations to which he had called attention in previous plays, he now made it his business to give a new and vivid illustration of the effect of these conditions—"to depict human beings, human emotions, and human destinies upon a ground-work of certain of the social conditions of the present day."

Even in his allusion to his motive in choosing the title of his play—the desire to indicate the power of heredity—he shows how impossible it was for him to get away from social problems. But since he had delivered the substance of his message already, it was well that he should make the attempt to drive that message home to the public mind rather than raise fresh and possibly confusing issues. One excellent result was that with his mind concentrated on the working of human motives on a background with which he had himself made us familiar, he was able to give some of the finest portraits in his whole wonderful gallery, and especially to draw amongst those portraits a female character which is one of the most complex and interesting, though one of the most repellent in all the literature of the drama. And this portrait he drew with so much subtlety, with such rare insight into the workings of the human mind that the study is lifted on to the plane of pure psychology.

From some of the previous plays of Ibsen we may see how the social conditions which the dramatist exposes hinder the progress of individual and collective ideals. Some of his characters are women in whom the aspiration after noble ideals is strongly developed; heredity, environment, inability to form right judgments, and other causes for which these women are not themselves responsible are the chief obstacles to those ideals being realised. It is a distinctive feature of "Hedda Gabler" that its central figure is a highly developed type of woman in whom no worthy ideal exists at all. Hence she is one of the worst products of a false civilisation.

A catalogue of the traits of character of Hedda as revealed in her words and actions must record that she is reckless and capricious; proud and extravagant; cunning, deceitful, and selfish; ambitious and desirous of power for her own gratification, and further that she is of a jealous nature, and withal callous and contemptuous of life, and at the same time cowardly. It is amongst her most fatal symptoms that she works tragic mischief almost without premeditation or calculation, and that she is for the most part oblivious to the natural consequences of her actions. At the same time, her personal beauty, the brightness of her intellect, and the artful vivacity of her conversation, go far to make those around her insensible to her many defects.

In the account which Hedda gives of her engagement to Tesman, we have one of the many illustrations which the play contains of her reckless and capricious nature. At the same time we have an illustration of the irresponsible spirit in which contracts, and especially marriage contracts, are

in many cases entered into—which undoubtedly Ibsen recognised to be one of the chief causes of mischief in human relations. Speaking of her marriage engagement Hedda says to Judge Brack: “I had positively danced myself tired. . . . And since Tesman was bent, at all hazards, on providing for me—I really don’t know why I should not have accepted his offer.”

Hedda and her husband are living in a villa which formerly belonged to a State official, Secretary Falk, or to his widow. And this villa had much to do with the marriage engagement. “I made use of Tesman to see me home from evening parties last summer,” says Hedda, still conversing with Judge Brack. “Well, we happened to pass here one evening; Tesman, poor fellow, was writhing in the agony of having to find conversation; so I took pity on the learned man. . . . To help him out of his torment, I happened to say, in pure thoughtlessness, that I should like to live in this villa. . . . My thoughtlessness had consequences. . . . It was this enthusiasm for Secretary Falk’s villa that first constituted a bond of sympathy between George Tesman and me. From that came our engagement and our marriage, and our wedding journey, and all the rest of it.”

“This is exquisite,” remarks Brack. “And you really cared not a rap about it all the time?” “No; Heaven knows I didn’t,” Hedda answers. Thus, even to a man who is trying to insinuate himself into her affections, as she may well perceive, does Hedda speak of the circumstances which led to her marriage.

In making herself a party to the choice of this costly residence the pride and ambition of Hedda

have been exemplified not less than her recklessness. And the caprice which she had displayed in the choice of her husband was now allied with extravagance in the furnishing of the villa, and in the making of provision for her comfort. It is horrible to her to find that the possibilities of going into society, of keeping open house, of having a footman and a saddle-horse, have disappeared as soon as the honeymoon has ended.

In order that she might shine with reflected glory, she would like her husband to go into politics, but she is warned by the sardonic Brack, by whose co-operation the Tesmans already have gone deeply into debt; that for this large means are necessary. Besides, Tesman has neither the requisite ability nor force of character to be greatly successful in anything. Of this Hedda is bitterly conscious. It is the realisation of the value of brains as a means of power that in large measure explains Hedda's predisposition to renew her affection for Eilert Lövborg, the writer of genius, of whose latest book everybody is talking, who has in manuscript a book still more wonderful, but whose fortunes depend entirely on the maintenance of his resolution to refrain from alcohol, which previously had been his bane.

Mrs. Elvsted, herself a victim of an unfortunate marriage, with some hold on the affections of Lövborg, has done much to assist him in rehabilitating his character. (The knowledge of this in itself evokes the jealous spirit of Hedda, whose arts of cunning and deceit are promptly used in getting from Mrs. Elvsted a full knowledge of the facts of the case, and using them to her own advantage.) It is in order at one and the same time to detach Lövborg from Mrs. Elvsted, and to test her own

power over Lövborg that she deliberately challenges him to drink a glass of cold punch, which she proffers to him, and also to go to the supper-party of Judge Brack, from which she well knows he must return "with vine-leaves in his hair." "I want for once in my life to have power to mould a human destiny," she declares. Whether it be for good or evil she neither considers nor cares.

Hedda's act in burning the precious manuscript which Tesman has found in the street, where it had been lost by the intoxicated Lövborg in returning from the party, is entirely characteristic. She is impelled by a mixture of motives, not the least of which is jealousy of Mrs. Elvsted—of Thea—who has inspired and assisted Lövborg in his work. "Now I am burning your child. Thea! . . . Your child and Eilert Lövborg's. I am burning—I am burning your child."

Then, too, her worldly position is of more importance to her than are the interests of Lövborg or the obligations of honesty towards a man to whom she is covertly attached. She is treacherously ready to avail herself of the means which accident has given her of diminishing the chances of Lövborg being an effective rival of Tesman for the professorship. For if this appointment should not come to her husband, the genteel poverty into which she declares that she has managed to drop would be unrelieved, and life, from her point of view, be more "pitiable," more "utterly ludicrous" than it is.

It is the growth of the desire that there shall be no obstacle to her husband's advancement, and jealous irritation with Lövborg, who, in deploring the loss of his manuscript, exclaims: "Thea's pure soul was in that book," which make Hedda so

readily accord with Lövborg's decision that he should end his troubles by suicide. She even provides him with the means of acting upon this decision by giving him one of the two pistols which she possesses. Here her callousness and contempt of life are supremely evident. It is one of those incidents in which she shows herself her father's daughter rather than her husband's wife.

There is marvellous consistency with her whole character in Hedda's suggestion to Lövborg that, in committing suicide, he shall do it "beautifully." It is no idea of courage that prompts Hedda to give this advice. Hedda is a coward in her fear to face her own future, and is not the woman to inspire courage in others. But hers is the sublimated selfishness which seeks to exclude from sight, and even from thought, all forms of physical ugliness which jar on her æsthetic sensibilities. "I will not look upon sickness and death; I loathe all sorts of ugliness." She is as fastidious as to the manner of a suicide as she was to the presence of the bonnet of old Aunt Tesman on her drawing-room chair. Of moral ugliness she has not a like appreciation.

It is only because of her capacity for self-deception and her predisposition to invest her own evil thoughts, intentions, and acts with the appearance of good that later on in the play, again alluding to the theme of suicide, she exclaims: "It gives me a sense of freedom to know that a deed of deliberate courage is still possible in this world—a deed of spontaneous beauty."

The *dénouement* of the play is the natural culmination of the succession of incidents in which Hedda is the evil genius. Lövborg, having accused a gay woman of the town of having stolen the

manuscript which Hedda already had burnt, and having quarrelled violently with this woman in consequence, is shot by her with Hedda's pistol. He dies in no way "beautifully"—his own will in no way controlling the manner of his death, and the shot penetrating neither his forehead nor his breast, but working its mischief otherwise. Hedda is faced with the risk of personal scandal, for Judge Brack knows that the pistol which was used had belonged to her, and he is inclined to press this knowledge to his own advantage in his effort to be one in a triangle in the Tesman household. At the same time the jealous nature of Hedda is aroused as never before by seeing her simple-minded husband *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Elvsted, assisting in the effort to reconstruct the lost manuscript from notes of it which are in Mrs. Elvsted's possession.

The dread of coming motherhood—as to which condition her curt comment to Judge Brack had been, "No responsibilities for me"—adds to the strain of her other embarrassments. What remains but that she should act as she had advised Lövborg to act. Suicide is a ready means of escape. She dies by her own hand—of course "beautifully." A pistol-shot through the forehead is the final diabolical expression of the mental and moral disorder with which she is afflicted.

It was for the purpose mainly of displaying this peculiar type of womanhood that this play was written. But all the other characters are well drawn. Ibsen, as I have said already, succeeds in his declared aim of depicting human beings, human emotions, and human destinies "upon a ground-work of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day." But Hedda exhibits the effect of

those social conditions and principles in its worst form.

Hedda truly represents, though in a highly accentuated degree, a type not difficult to recognise in modern society. One consolation which we may derive from this play lies in the assurance that it is a type which tends to extinction. Pass away it must. Whether by swift self-destruction of individuals who belong to it; by the slower working of those laws of God which forbid the indefinite survival on this plane of existence of those who are unfit; or by the amendment, the redemption, of those in whom the angel nature, though buried, is not dead, and to whom the possibilities of good are yet as great as have been the actualities of evil, it *must* pass away.

Chapter XI

Psychological Plays—(*continued*)

“The Master Builder”—Not Autobiographical—Its Real Symbolical Purport—Destructive Effects of Selfish Ambition—Woman’s Power for Good and for Evil—Passing Away of Predatory Ideals—Parallelism with “Macbeth.”

THE next of the plays which belongs to the later period of Ibsen’s career is “The Master Builder.” This, like its two predecessors, is a powerful psychological study with a substratum of character and incident formed or arranged in consonance with the enforcement of the doctrines of life which Ibsen in his more definitely social plays had put forward. Even more than most of its predecessors it reveals the poetic genius of Ibsen, especially in the use of symbolism. The play is, indeed, an allegory which though not symbolic in all its details is, at any rate, symbolic in its main outlines. The relative importance of this play in the writings of Ibsen is in my opinion such that I feel that I need offer no excuse for making a more close analysis of it than I have done of any of the other works with which this volume more especially deals.

It has been inevitable that difference of opinion should have existed as to the allegorical and symbolical meaning of this play. In his introduction to “The Master Builder” in the Heinemann issue of the collected works Mr. Archer says :

“ That the play is full of symbolism it would be futile to deny ; and the symbolism is mainly autobiographic. The churches which Solness sets out by building doubtless represent Ibsen’s early romantic plays : the homes for human beings his social dramas ; while the houses with high towers, merging into castles in the air, stand for those spiritual dramas, with a wide outlook over the metaphysical environment of humanity, on which he was henceforth to be engaged.”

My own analysis of the play has led me to the conclusion that it does not admit of this autobiographical interpretation at all.

However we may finally agree to interpret the symbolism of “ The Master Builder ” we must, of course, admit that it was chosen to develop or express the character of the central figure. In that case, if Mr. Archer’s theory were right, we should expect to find at least a moral resemblance between the Ibsen whose life and character are known to us and this central figure. Is there really such a resemblance ?

On this point I venture to appeal to evidence provided by Mr. Archer himself. To the shilling edition of the play which was published in 1893 Mr. Archer appended an essay entitled “ The Melody of ‘ The Master Builder. ’ ” In this essay he advances the argument that the symbols of the play are “ harmonic undertones,” and that the psychological melody is clear and consistent without them. The special object of this argument I need not here refer to further than to observe that Mr. Archer wished to convince objectors that there was nothing incredible or extravagant in Ibsen’s conception.

For the purposes of his argument Mr. Archer retells the story. He puts it into the form of a brief

prose narrative, transplanting the scene and the incidents to England, and making the chief figure a journalist instead of a builder.

Mr. Archer works out his story in quite a masterly way ; in the points at issue his vindication of Ibsen is, in my opinion, complete. But surely no one, least of all Mr. Archer himself, would recognise any resemblance between the portrait of the journalist which is the result, and Ibsen. It is the portrait of a type of character which, rightly considered, is diabolic. It is not a portrait which Ibsen could ever have sat for.

Clearly, then, it is legitimate to contend that unless those elements of symbolism to which Mr. Archer refers can be disassociated from the character which in "The Master Builder" it was Ibsen's chief aim to portray—and it is not in the nature of the case that they can be so disassociated—any separation of the kind must be arbitrary—it can in no way be right to assume that this symbolism is in the main autobiographic, or, indeed, autobiographic in any degree.

It may be that the title of the play, which is taken from the occupation of the central figure, partly accounts for the predisposition which certainly has existed to regard Solness as a type of a strong idealist, and, therefore, in some sense a piece of self-portraiture on the part of Ibsen. The uses of building and the possibilities of beauty in architecture have from Biblical days until now given to the name of "master builder" a noble significance. But I am persuaded that in the case of Ibsen's play the term was adopted with a terribly ironic intent.

Solness is no more a noble idealist than was Hedda

Gabler, to whom, indeed, in his determination to have his own way, no matter what the cost to others, he has a relationship which is not quite remote. He is a type of soaring selfishness, of the ambition which is pursued with no real view to social service. That he set out by building churches, passed to the building of homes for human beings, but ended by building houses with high towers, merging into "castles in the air," is to be taken to symbolise his spiritual declension. Building of some sort was a necessity of his livelihood. Hence, when he abandoned the building of churches, homes for human beings naturally were taken up. But houses with high towers! Houses with high towers are not the common dwelling-places of men; for the most part they are the abodes of pride and luxury, of those who wish to lord it over their fellows. And since the happiness which the possession of such houses is supposed to bring is for ever illusory, these houses in their symbolic aspect truly merge into "castles in the air."

With this aspect of the case before us we may see that "The Master Builder" is in the main an allegory setting forth the destructive effects of ignoble ambition, of the ambition which pursues its own ends in disregard of social consequences.

Incidentally, the play illustrates the evil which arises in the lives of men from ignoring the finer instincts and intuitions of womankind, and from yielding to the worser impulses which a bad woman is capable of inspiring. Further, it is an allegory of the passing away of the old predatory ideals of life at the demand of a new generation which already is knocking at the door.

There are three outstanding characters in the play

—Solness, his wife, and Hilda Wangel. Solness is one of those men who are popularly known as self-made. The men of this type who in the industrial world attain to fame and riches are in most cases men of great natural ability and strength of will, but of very imperfect mental and moral culture. It is their lack of culture which favours their superior insensibility to any interest but their own, and is one secret of their success; in large measure it explains and justifies the description of such men as *self-made*. Let Hamlet be in any walk of life you will, and he must prove too much of a gentleman ever to come within the self-made category; your Richard, Duke of Gloster, will attain to the distinction readily.

It is worth noting how Ibsen, in his own masterly way, suggests the want of culture in Solness not alone by the broader details of the portrait, but by one or two significant minor ones. As a rule these self-made men are acutely conscious of their deficiencies in education and training, and equally are they conscious of the power which culture gives to those who possess it. They feel that if they cannot have the reality they will at least have the externals. Hence they surround themselves with emblems of culture, with books that they perhaps never read, and could not understand if they did read; and with pictures and statuary which they can only faintly appreciate. Observe, in this connection, the conversation between Solness and Hilda Wangel in the second act. Hilda exclaims: "What a lot of books you have." Solness replies: "Yes, I've got together a good many." "Do you read them all, too?" "I used to try to."

Even more than most self-made men Solness is

blatant, egoistic and cruel. His blatancy and egoism reach the point of blasphemy and impiety. In the third act he recalls how ten years before, at Lysanger, a place some distance from his home, on the completion of a church tower which he had built, he had climbed, in accordance with an old custom, to the top of it, and hung a wreath on the vane. In relating the incident, he exclaims: "And when I stood there, high over everything, and was hanging the wreath over the vane, I said . . . 'Hear me now, thou Mighty One! From this day forward I will be a free builder—I too, in my sphere—just as Thou in Thine.'"

The spirit of cruelty in Solness is unbounded. It is, withal, accompanied with intense meanness, and much actual cowardice. We see this early in the play. Knut Brovik, formerly an architect on his own account, once employed Solness; now he is in the employment of Solness, as is also his gifted son, Ragnar. And to Solness the old man reproachfully exclaims: "You had learned little enough of the business when you were in my employment. But that didn't prevent you from setting to work—and pushing your way up, and taking the wind out of my sails—mine, and other people's."

Old Brovik has been stung into making this reproach by the way in which his son has been kept down by Solness. And yet we soon perceive that Solness is full of fear lest this son should leave him and set up on his own account. This youth, whose ability he refuses to recognise, is, in fact, his mainstay; Solness has not ability of his own sufficient to be independent of the assistance of what is known in the art world as the "ghost."

Young Ragnar represents the new generation, and

it is with him more especially in view that Solness in the first act exclaims to Dr. Herdal: "The luck will turn. I know it—I feel the day approaching. Some one or other will take it into his head to say: 'Give *me* a chance.' And then all the rest will come clamouring after him, and shake their fists at me and shout: 'Make room—make room—make room.' Yes, just you see, Doctor—presently the younger generation will come knocking at my door. . . . Then there's an end of Halvard Solness."

All the moral defects of Solness may be said to group themselves round, or to be especially manifest in one particular incident, which has occurred long before the opening of the play, but, nevertheless, looms large in the unfolding of the character of Solness as here presented, and in the action. This is the incident of the burning down of the old house which Solness had acquired with his wife, and which was their first home. The burning down of this house had been the turning-point in the fortunes of Solness. It had enabled him to open out for building purposes an estate on which the house had stood. But, morally, it has been his undoing. The burning down of the house was due to calculated neglect on his own part—to neglect in mending a crack in a chimney. But the precise time and manner of the fire had not been calculated. The health of Mrs. Solness had been ruined, and her two infant boys had lost their lives as after-consequences of the disaster.

Solness now stands not alone in mortal fear of the younger generation that is knocking at the door, but with a sense of guilt under which his reason is beginning to go. He is himself conscious of the approach of madness. Amongst other ways

in which this shows itself is an acute suspicion that his wife and the doctor think that he is mad already.

It is at this crisis in the life of Solness that Hilda Wangel is introduced. By some expositors Hilda has been regarded as like Ragnar, though even more so, an embodiment of the younger generation of whom Solness stood in fear. Amongst those who have taken this view is Mr. Archer, who in the essay to which I have referred already speaks of a well-known critic as "exemplifying that light-hearted cruelty of the younger generation which Ibsen has embodied in Hilda."

My view is that Ibsen did *not* embody the younger generation in Hilda. Neither did he conceive of the younger generation as light-heartedly cruel, though to an incarnation of selfishness like Solness anyone who came forward under conditions which threatened to put an end to his own evil power as, for example, did Ragnar, no doubt would appear so.

In his introduction to the play in the complete edition, Mr. Archer quotes words which Ibsen is reported to have used in the course of conversation with a Dr. Elias at Berlin, in 1891, shortly before the play was written. They throw much light, as I believe, on the ideas which were present to the mind of Ibsen in creating the character of Hilda. To Dr. Elias, Ibsen remarked: "Do you know, my next play is already hovering before me—of course, in vague outline. But of one thing I have got firm hold: an experience; a woman's figure. Very interesting, very interesting indeed."

Mr. Archer tells us that Ibsen then related to the doctor how he had met in the Tyrol a Viennese girl of a very remarkable character. She had at once made him her confidant. The gist of her con-

fessions was that she did not care a bit about one day marrying a well-brought-up young man—most likely she would never marry. What tempted and charmed and delighted her was to lure other women's husbands away from them. She was "a little dæmonic wrecker"; she often appeared to him like "a little bird of prey," that would fain have made him, too, her booty. "But," said Ibsen, "she did not get hold of me. I got hold of her—for my play."

"A little dæmonic wrecker!" "a little bird of prey!" As I read the character of Hilda in "The Master Builder" I feel that *she* quite answers to this description.

Hilda belongs, in fact, to the old generation, not to the new, the younger one. It is true that Hilda is only twenty-two or twenty-three years of age, whilst Solness has reached maturity. But in this matter the test of age is spiritual condition. The new generation stands to Solness as an influence or power which is full of menace to him, and to which, therefore, he is antipathetic in the very nature of things. But there is nothing antipathetic between Solness and Hilda. In my view Hilda is the feminine counterpart of Solness; she differs from him in no essential feature, excepting that, being younger in years, her zeal is greater. Like-minded with Solness, her office in the scheme of Ibsen is to stimulate all that is worst in Solness, to strengthen his will-power, which is becoming enfeebled owing to his sense of guilt, and to impel him to that self-destructive course of action which ensures the fullest retribution for the evil of his life. She comes precisely at the moment when her influence is likely to be most potent to these ends.

One need not spend much time in considering the circumstance that Hilda, who is almost a stranger to Solness, makes a claim of intimacy with him from the moment of her arrival, even calls herself his princess, and seeks to obtain from him what she calls her kingdom. In a work so largely allegorical and symbolic as is "The Master Builder" much latitude in details of this kind must be given. At the same time, it must be allowed that the hypnotic powers which Ibsen, in several parts of the play, ascribes to Solness go far to explain the situation.

When Hilda was a girl of twelve or thirteen years of age she had witnessed the feat of Solness in placing the wreath on the vane of the church tower at Lysanger. She had been fascinated by his daring, and when on the same day he had come to her home, as the guest of her father, she had displayed her hero-worship to the full. Solness had responded in a playful spirit; told her that when she grew up she should be his princess, and that he would carry her off to Spain or some other land of romance, and buy her a kingdom.

Hilda has lived in the faith of this promise ever since. But as her character is unfolded in the course of the play we may see that she suffers from the same megalomania, the same passion for the doing of great things as does Solness, and that her selfish love of power is similar to his own. This is why Solness, at first incredulous as to the claim which she makes upon him, soon comes to welcome her as a possible source of strength. He remarks to her: "The more I think of it now, the more it seems to me as though I had gone about all these years torturing myself with . . . the effort to

recover something—some experience, which I seemed to have forgotten.” The truth is that with the sense of guilt weighing him down, and the fear of the younger generation strong within him, the presence of this kindred spirit, and the vivid revival of the recollections of the incidents of ten years before, have created in him the illusion that he has all his old strength, and that he is as powerful now to control his fate as he was then.

“What a good thing it is that you have come to me now,” he exclaims to Hilda; “I’ve been so lonely here. I’ve been gazing so helplessly at it all. I must tell you—I’ve begun to be so afraid—so terribly afraid of the younger generation. . . . The younger generation—it means retribution, you see. It comes, as if under a new banner, heralding the turn of fortune.”

On this Hilda rises, looks at him, and says with a quivering twitch of her lips, “Can *I* be of any use to you, Mr. Solness?” “Yes, you can indeed! For you, too, come—under a new banner, it seems to me. Youth marshalled against youth.”

Precisely so. As I have said, Solness now is deriving fictitious strength from Hilda’s presence. Against the younger generation, by which he knows he may be ousted and morally condemned, the generation whose onward march means to him “retribution,” he will enlist as an ally one who is in spiritual affinity with himself, and has on her side also the physical advantage of youth.

In his insane readiness to delude himself in all those matters that relate to his own advantage, ere long he thinks of Hilda as even a representative of the younger generation. “*You* are the younger generation, Hilda,” he exclaims.

But this view of Hilda is sheer self-deception. Nor is there any true relation to the facts of the case in the remark of Solness which follows, expressing that in his heart he yearns to the younger generation deeply. Between him and the younger generation with its love of truth and justice, and its fidelity, and above all its social ideals, there can be no real sympathy.

Possibly enough, he would rather make terms with it than be vanquished by it. But his real attitude towards the younger generation is one not of sympathy, but fear and envy. What in his heart he yearns for is the power which he knows to belong to it, and which, inevitably, he would pervert, if it were at his command.

Hilda soon is all-potent in the life of Solness. But, as I have indicated, her influence over him is entirely evil. The reader will remember that in "Hedda Gabler" the enchantress after whom that play is named, referring to the control which she is exercising over Lövborg, says: "I want for once in my life to have power to mould a human destiny." In what way she moulds that destiny she cares not, so long as she has proof that the power is hers. So it is with Hilda Wangel. To rule over Solness will be to possess her kingdom. This is now her sole ambition.

Hilda's portraits of herself are very faithful. One of them recalls a phrase used by Ibsen in his description to Dr. Elias of the girl he had met in the Tyrol and had made a model for Hilda. "There's something of the bird of prey in you," says Solness. "And why not a bird of prey?" responds Hilda. "Why shouldn't I go a-hunting—I, as well as the rest? Carry off the prey I want—if I can get my

claws into it, and have my own way with it." Such a display of strength of character appeals to Solness. He does not appreciate that it is over himself most of all that she desires to have power.

But do not let us here misunderstand either Hilda or Ibsen in his portrait of Hilda. Hilda is not an entirely non-human or non-moral type of woman. In her desire that the Master Builder shall be exalted under her influence, and that he shall stand alone, she impels him to the dismissal of the "ghost" on whose ability he is so dependent. No doubt she is also in some degree jealous of the presence in the office of Ragnar's sweetheart, Kaia, who has a feeling of hero-worship towards Solness, and is under his hypnotic influence. For her own ends Hilda can be guilty of injustice to Ragnar, and to Kaia too. Yet when Solness, in a brutal way, refuses Ragnar's appeal that he shall certify the merits of certain plans drawn by Ragnar, who wishes to take the certificate to solace his dying father, Hilda, on the departure of Ragnar, reproaches Solness and remarks: "That was a very ugly thing to do . . . horribly ugly and bad and cruel as well." "Oh, you don't understand my position," replies Solness. "You said yourself, only just now, that no one but I ought to be allowed to build." And Hilda answers: "*I* may say such things—but *you* mayn't." Thus we see in the complex nature of Hilda a momentary feeling of compassion for Ragnar, strangely blended with her aspiration to control the fate of Solness. "*I* may say such things—but *you* mayn't."

As the play advances, however, the small indications which she gives of human sympathy become fewer and less real. Solness, in his sense of guilt

for the evil of his life, and especially for being the indirect cause of the death of his children, and also in his fear of retribution, reminds us of Macbeth after the murder of Duncan. Hilda, whose sole thought is concerned with the achievements which Solness has yet to perform under her influence, reminds us of Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth reproaches her husband for "letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would.' " Hilda on her part contemplates the glorious possibilities of a strong and self-centred course, "if one had a really vigorous, radiantly healthy conscience—so that one *dared* to do what one *would*."

As a type of womanhood Hilda stands in entire contrast to Mrs. Solness. The wife of the Master Builder is one of those women—and there are, or, at any rate have been, many of them—who, with a boundless capacity for self-sacrifice and usefulness, are repressed and crushed through being united to strong but selfish men, by whom their finer qualities are ignored. Such women represent an immense wealth of affection which is lost to our social life, or which, for the most part, runs to waste—the chief cause being, in the view of Ibsen, disregard of truth in human relationships, and especially in the relationship of marriage.

Mrs. Solness has long been conscious that her husband's loyalty could not be depended upon, and that, despite all those professions of love and devotion by which she had been wooed and won, he has all along sought his own interest and pleasure. The treatment which she has received from her husband, combined with grief for the loss of her children, and ill-health, which the calamity of the fire brought on—ill-health owing to which, we are

given to understand, she must remain childless—have reduced her to a weak and feeble condition, so much so that to the unsympathetic eye she appears entirely colourless and unattractive. She is utterly unable to hold her own. She endures conditions in her household which a woman of health and vigour would not tolerate ; the interest which Solness displays in Hilda Wangel and in Kaia, though observed by her, provoke no outward expression of resentment, and stimulate her to no act of self-assertion.

Duty is inimical to self-will, and to the gratification of the love of power. For that reason we can well understand that it is repellent to Hilda Wangel. “ Oh, I can’t bear that ugly word ! ” she is heard to exclaim. Yet duty is a word that is often on the lips of Mrs. Solness ; indeed, it is her high sense of duty, inspired, as we must believe, by a lofty and habitual piety, which alone enables her now to preserve the even tenour of her way.

A curious detail in the portrait of Mrs. Solness is the grief which she still feels for the loss of her dolls in the fire that led also to the death of her children. I agree with Mr. Archer that there is nothing foolish, nothing weak in this feature of Ibsen’s work. Indeed, I regard it as one of the many master-strokes which the play contains. The piety of Mrs. Solness induces her to resign herself to the loss of her children ; that loss she regards as the will of God. But these dolls, which she had loved from childhood—how could the Ruler of the Universe concern Himself about them ? “ Oh yes, the boys,” she says. “ But, you see, that was a thing apart. That was a dispensation of Providence ; and in such things one can only bow in submission—yes, and be thank-

ful too." And later on she remarks: "Oh, no, no, Miss Wangel—don't talk to me any more about the two little boys. We ought to feel nothing but joy in thinking of *them*; for they are so happy—so happy now. No, it's the *small* losses in life that cut one to the heart—the loss of all that other people look upon as almost nothing."

Amongst these "small losses" in her case has been the loss of the dolls. This loss she must have the privilege of mourning. Poor, unreasoning creature, she does not realise that in her abiding grief for the loss of the dolls she is all the while, by a perfectly easy process of self-deception, covertly mourning the loss of the children.

Solness, the Master Builder, is conscious of the deep injury that he has done to his wife. To Hilda, in his time of agony, he exclaims: "Aline—she, too, had her vocation in life, just as much as I had mine. But her vocation has had to be stunted, and crushed, and shattered—in order that mine might force its way to—to a sort of great victory. . . . She, too, had a turn for building . . . not houses, and towers, and spires—not such things as I work away at . . . for building up the souls of little children. For building up children's souls in perfect balance, and in noble and beautiful forms. For enabling them to soar up into erect and full-grown human souls. That was Aline's talent. And there it all lies now—unused, and unusable for ever—of no earthly service to anyone—just like the ruins left by a fire."

As the fear of retribution grows upon Solness, and he is being more and more pushed over the borderline of sanity, he tries to account for his actions by a theory of possession by spirits. "There are."

he says, " devils innumerable abroad in the world, Hilda, that one never sees. . . . Good devils and bad devils ; light-haired devils and black-haired devils. If only you could always tell whether it's the light or the dark ones that have got hold of you ! . . . Then it would be simple enough."

Thus he tries to shift from his own shoulders the responsibility for guilt, not realising that the spirits which enter into a man are at all times those which he himself invites.

In the way in which the author leads us up to the catastrophe of the play, and in the nature of that catastrophe, there is wonderful dramatic power. I have pointed out that the spiritual declension of Solness is signified by the fact that, beginning with the building of churches, he ends by avoiding the building of churches entirely, being devoted simply to the building of houses. In the third act we hear him say to Hilda : " I came as a boy from a pious home in the country ; and so it seemed to me that this church-building was the noblest task I could set myself." But—he explains—he gave up that ideal on the day that he placed the wreath on the vane of Lysanger church. Then he had vowed that henceforth he would be a free " builder," which, in truth, meant a builder according to his own will—defiant of Divine direction.

Even if at any time he had repented having come to this impious resolution, he no longer would have had the power to build churches. For he has confessed to Hilda—in the second act—that from the day on which he lost his children he had no heart at all for such work.

The declension of Solness is further emphasised—as also I have indicated—by the fact that

even in the building of houses he has a passion for a particular kind, houses with high towers. It is a grievance with him that this class of house is not in demand. "People won't have it," he complains. However, he has found one great outlet for his energies, at any rate. It has been in building a house *for himself*. The house that he has built has a high tower, a very high tower. "No doubt people will say that it's too high—too high for a dwelling-house," he remarks. And we who observe the position of the house will conclude that on this point Solness cannot be mistaken.

The house adjoins a street with low, tumble-down cottages that emphasise the contrast between riches and poverty, which generally is most violent where the self-made man flourishes.

The new house being finished, there is to be a fête, and it is intended that the custom shall be observed of hanging a wreath on the tower. This is to be done by the foreman; Solness is now too old and too heavy. He is liable to become dizzy.

Mrs. Solness, true in her instincts and intuitions, perceives that there is a danger that Solness may yield to a mad wish to put the wreath on the tower himself. To this very act the "dæmonic wrecker," Hilda Wangel, on her part, strives to impel him. To cause him to repeat the achievement of that memorable day at Lysanger, when first she met him, and when she promised to be his princess, would be a crowning proof of her power over him.

Weak in mind, inflated with pride, and deluded with the belief that the strength of Hilda has entered into him, Solness yields. Eluding the observation of his friends, he steals out of his present home to

the new building ; he takes the wreath from the hands of the foreman—and then——

Vividly is the scene pictured to us in the conversation of Hilda, Ragnar and the rest. We can almost see the Master Builder as he climbs up to the top of the tower and hangs the wreath on the vane, waving his hat to the cheering crowd below. And we feel the horror of the situation when the spectators are suddenly silenced, and when amidst their shrieks “a human body, with planks and fragments of wood, is vaguely perceived crashing down behind the trees.” “His head is all crushed. He fell right into the quarry,” is the account that some of the spectators give of his death.

This quarry is one which Solness had spoken of as the “great quarry.”

A site on the very edge of a great quarry is not an ideal site for a dwelling-house. It is not a site that a real Master Builder would choose. But it is such a site as a man like Solness would even prefer, for when seen from some points of view, his house with its high tower, because it was built there, would seem higher still than it was.

This idea may be assumed to have been present to the mind of Ibsen. But, of course, his chief purpose in describing the house as occupying such a site has not been merely to add another stroke to his portrait of Solness, but to emphasise the symbolic quality of the catastrophe. Solness, the great type of selfishness, whose pride, arrogance and cruelty we have seen, had reared for himself an abode from which he could not only look down on the low, ramshackle and squalid cottages of his neighbours, but an abode which could be viewed from miles around as a monument of his own riches

and power. Yet he had fallen from the topmost point of the tower of it into the quarry from which the stone for the house had been taken !

Though with a difference, the catastrophe is an illustration of the words of the Psalmist, "He hath made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made." The mischief of Solness has "returned upon his own head," and his violence has "come down upon his own pate."

As to Hilda Wangel, at first, as she witnesses the disaster, disappointment mingles with horror. She stares fixedly upwards, and cries, as if petrified, "*My Master Builder*." But as she recovers herself she exclaims, "as if in quiet, spellbound triumph": "But he mounted right to the top. And I heard harps in the air." She waves her shawl, and shrieks with wild intensity: "*My Master Builder*."

The future of Hilda we can well divine. Already she has lost her "kingdom." And not less than Solness can she escape from the moral law by which the universe is ruled, or from the retribution which follows upon—nay, which accompanies—the defiance of that law.

I have hinted at an element of parallelism between "*The Master Builder*" and "*Macbeth*." I think it probable that Ibsen had Shakespeare's play in mind when he wrote the work with which we have been dealing. The elements of parallelism seem to me to be too numerous and too definite to be mere coincidences.

We have in the central character of Ibsen's play that peculiar combination of ambition and moral weakness which distinguishes *Macbeth*. Then we have corresponding elements of superstition. *Macbeth* has a belief in witches. No one believes in

witches in these days. But Solness has a superstition which is a modern equivalent. He believes in the existence of supernatural beings whom he calls "helpers and servers," and in the existence of "light-haired devils and black-haired devils" which enter into a man and control his actions for good fortune or for ill—devils which surely are of the tribe of which, in stage representations of "Macbeth," the witches are made to sing :

" Black spirits and white,
Red spirits and gray,
Mingle, mingle, mingle,
You that mingle, may."

Solness, too, at the crisis in his fate, is under a dominating feminine influence. The equivalent of Lady Macbeth in Ibsen's play is Hilda Wangel. It is true that she is not in a similar degree deliberately wicked ; her wickedness is rather elfish than conscious and calculated. Yet in some respects Hilda's motives are similar to those of Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth desires to attain glory and power through the achievements of her husband ; Hilda, in like manner, seeks a great triumph through the instrumentality of Solness.

As bearing upon what may actually have been in the mind of Ibsen when he wrote this play the words which I have called attention to already in which Hilda speaks of the possibilities of strong action "if one had a really vigorous, radiantly healthy conscience—so that one dared to do what one would," are, I think, very significant. What Hilda means is that sort of conscience which does not get in the way, which is not a hindrance, and, as we see, she is made to use words which are almost

identical with those which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Lady Macbeth when she is striving to fortify the resolution of her husband.

But our parallels are not exhausted. Solness as truly as Macbeth is the victim of evil jugglery. As I said earlier on, the spirits that take possession of a man are those which he himself invites. It is not less true that the interpretations which are put upon events by a man who is inordinately bent upon the attainment of a particular object are, in general, those which most favour his own prepossessions. Macbeth seeks the evil aid of witches because his nature bends towards evil, and when they utter their oracular predictions he is only too ready to give those utterances a construction which flatters his own hopes. Solness, though in a less obvious fashion, is similarly victimised.

I mentioned that Hilda Wangel is introduced just at the time when the will-power of Solness is becoming enfeebled owing to his sense of guilt, and when she may impel him to that self-destructive course of action which must ensure the fullest retribution for the evil of his life. Observe, then, how Solness at this very moment is the victim of his "black-haired devils." His fear of the younger generation is at its height; his sense of his own weakness is at its greatest. He is virtually confessing all this to Dr. Herdal, when, lo, there is a knock at the door, and Hilda comes in. We have not to wait long to see that Solness is conscious of her spiritual affinity with himself, and that he grasps at the idea that with her in association with him he will have all needful strength. As we saw, he even hails her as belonging to the younger generation, and thinks that at last the battle will be one

of youth against youth. And all the while it is jugglery, pure jugglery.

Macbeth in relation to those supernatural forces whose aid he has invoked has his times of intense doubt and depression. When the crisis of his life comes he cries :

“ And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,
That palter with us in a double sense ;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope ! ”

In relation to his “ light-haired devils and black-haired devils ” Solness, when the catastrophe of his life is approaching, is also filled with perplexity. He exclaims : “ If only you could always tell whether it's the light or the dark ones that have got hold of you ! . . . Then it would be simple enough ! ”

Further, as between “ The Master Builder ” and “ Macbeth ” there is the parallel of the murder of Duncan in Shakespeare's play and of the constructive murder, or the manslaughter of the two children in Ibsen's play. The fact that the death of the children is treated retrospectively in Ibsen's play is, of course, a mere detail ; just as it does not affect the psychology or the characterisation in any sense, it does not affect the parallelism.

And, finally, there are the corresponding elements of remorse, the unhinging effects of the sense of guilt, and the catastrophe in each case brought about, or, at any rate, signalled by a sort of insane confidence as to possible victory.

I venture to think that in pointing to these features of Ibsen's play I have said enough to justify my suggestion that in “ The Master Builder ”

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Ibsen has in reality given us a nineteenth-century "Macbeth," and that in all probability this was in no small measure actually his intention. In any case—whatever the fact as to his intention may have been—of this I am certain, that the reading of Shakespeare's play is the very best preparation that any student can have for the reading of "The Master Builder."

Chapter XII

Psychological Plays—(*continued*)

“ Little Eyolf ”—The Symbolism of the Rat-Wife—The Part of Sin and Death in the Great World-Scheme—Ibsen's Transcendent Type of Avarice—Transition to a Higher Life—The Service of Humanity.

WE have seen that hitherto Ibsen has dealt with a wide range of social evils—evils which he deemed to be peculiar to his own age, though, of course, with varying degrees of acuteness, they have existed in every civilised community in all ages. But there was one evil with which he had not definitely dealt, and that was the evil of avarice and soul-destroying greed. To this he devoted himself in his next play, though, as may be assumed, in a manner which was consistent with what I have described as the latest phase of his development—making the more social element in his work subordinate to those psychological studies which now chiefly absorbed his energies.

The play to which I refer is “ Little Eyolf.” This work, in its superficial aspect, is one of the simplest of the plays of Ibsen. In its more symbolical, allegorical, and, I will add, mystical aspects, it must be ranked, however, as amongst the most subtle. It is especially rich in the evidence of that deeper spiritual insight which distinguished the later work of the poet.

The first clue to the meaning of this play is in the introduction of the Rat-Wife. As to this weird being, Mr. Archer, in his prefatory remarks on the play, says: "There cannot be the least doubt, I think, that in the poet's mind the Rat-Wife is the symbol of Death, of the 'still, soft darkness' that is at once so fearful and so fascinating to humanity." I share Mr. Archer's view on this point to the full.

From the fact that Death is introduced in the guise of a Rat-Wife, we may without difficulty see that an allegory of the effects of avarice and greed is intended. If, perchance, this is not at once apparent from the description of herself which the Rat-Wife gives, the development of the play will leave no room for doubt in the matter.

In Nature the rat is one of those agents which seem to have been brought into existence expressly to make war on avaricious accumulations, at the same time as, by performing the office of scavenger, they remove effete and putrid matter. The symbolism of the rat is in accordance with the uses which the rat performs. By making the Rat-Wife his symbol of Death, Ibsen directs attention more especially to certain aspects of the work of Death which the play as a whole illustrates.

In this connection we may note that the Rat-Wife tells Little Eyolf that she once had a sweetheart, whom she had lured. "And where is he now, then?" Eyolf inquires. And the Rat-Wife answers harshly: "Down where all the rats are."

Mr. Archer, on this subject, remarks: "I have my own suspicions as to who is meant by her 'sweetheart,' whom she 'lured' long ago, and who is now 'down where all the rats are.' This theory

I shall keep to myself ; it may be purely fantastic, and is at best inessential."

Naturally, Mr. Archer has a tender regard for his reputation as an expositor, and besides, has too much Scotch caution to commit himself readily on so difficult a point of interpretation as this. I on my part have not a similarly great reputation to imperil. And, therefore, I have temerity enough to suggest that when the Rat-Wife speaks of her sweetheart she is referring to Sin. This with its concomitants of disease, decay, suffering and pain is her chief coadjutor.

The fact that the Rat-Wife says that her sweetheart is "down where all the rats are"—thus implying that even Sin is subject to the Power of Death—does not detract from the possible truth of this interpretation. We are in a region of mystery and paradox. We have to recognise that though Sin provides the conditions under which Death may act, nevertheless, when the work of Death is perfected the result is extinction, change, or resurrection to a condition in which even Sin itself is overthrown. It is true that this is a process which is not universal, but particular, not immediate or temporary, but continuous. Yet in the mind of the Rat-Wife it is with Sin as it is with the rats which she lures and buries in the sea. She is ever giving this proof of her power, though the occasion for the exercise of her power does not cease.

Whether we are to regard the attempt to interpret this part of the play on these lines as "inessential," as does Mr. Archer with the interpretation which he so carefully keeps secret, may be a matter of opinion. I suggest, however, that the view which Ibsen was now formulating as to the

part which Sin and Death play in the great world-scheme needs to be closely studied if we are to follow rightly the trend of his thought.

The more we study this play the more it will be evident that the conception which was uppermost in Ibsen's thought was the conception of death as a beneficent power, whose operations are wisely directed at once for the destruction of evil and the furtherance of good.

It is important to remember, however, for a clear understanding of this argument, that Death is to be considered not merely in the limited popular sense of the term, not merely as the destroyer of the body, but in all its physical and spiritual aspects—in its spiritual aspects most of all—as the great agent of dissolution and change, the agent which by destroying the old makes possible the coming of the new, the agent which by taking away those things and those conditions which have fulfilled their purpose prepares the way for new things or new conditions.

When Ibsen wrote this play he had come to see that, in a deeper and wider sense than is popularly understood, "Death is the Gate of Life." Apparently, in his own mind, the law of change, so often referred to by Allmers, was viewed serenely and with acceptance.

Not further to expatiate on this point, let me direct attention to one or two features in the action of the play.

The Rat-Wife comes to the house of the Allmers family, and inquires whether they have there any "gnawing things." If they have, she is willing to assist them to get rid of them. Neither Allmers nor his wife, Rita, is conscious at the time of any service

which the Rat-Wife can perform. Yet, if they but knew it, spiritually their household is one of which "gnawing things" have taken entire possession, those things which mar the growth of the soul and are destructive of true happiness.

As I have indicated, the prime source of the evil is avarice and greed. Allmers and his half-sister, Asta, had formerly been "poor, orphan children." When the strain of calamity comes, he frankly declares to his wife that he married her for the sake of her gold and her lands, her "green forests." Her entrancing beauty was also a factor in his choice; indeed, when the confession is wrung from him, he has delicacy enough to put this first in the catalogue. Even in admitting that the gold and lands were so powerful an attraction, he tries to preserve his self-respect by pleading also that he was solicitous to be able to make provision for Asta, the half-sister to whom he was devoted. But these are the subterfuges of a man who is confessedly guilty; their precise worth need not be estimated.

Be the extenuation what it may, the fact remains that Allmers has founded his domestic life in the main on his love for gold and lands, and that in his personal relations with the woman he married he finds nothing to attract him but qualities which are physical and external. What but avarice is the mainspring of his action?

But the avarice of Allmers is exceeded far by that of his wife, Rita.

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18-19
We are in the habit of thinking of avarice as a passion for the accumulation of material riches with a view to the gratification of the possessor. Spiritually, however, avarice has a vastly wider definition. It is a passion for the exclusive possession

of anything that is an object of desire—it may be for a human affection just as for lucre—without regard to, or at the cost of, the fulfilment of social duty or obligation. In other words, avarice is the love of possession divorced from or excluding the love of use.

In the case of Mrs. Allmers, Ibsen, with this view of avarice in his mind, gives us an illustration which is truly daring in its originality. It consists in the mental and moral attitude which Mrs. Allmers takes up towards the husband who, though she was not conscious of it, married her chiefly for the sake of her gold and lands.

In Mrs. Allmers we have, in fact, one of the highest conceivable types of avarice. Her avarice consists in such a narrow and self-centred desire to monopolise the affection of her husband, that she is acutely jealous even of her husband's natural and entirely wholesome love for his and her own child, and of his affection for his sister, or rather half-sister, Asta.

Speaking with reference to Eyolf, Mrs. Allmers exclaims to her husband: "The child is only half mine; but you shall be mine—alone! You shall be wholly mine!" "I want you utterly and entirely—and alone!" And as to the half-sister, Mrs. Allmers tries to persuade herself that she would have had a real maternal affection for the child but for the fact that Asta, when the child became a cripple, took pity on and loved it. "She took him to her heart—from the moment that happened—that miserable fall." "If she did so, she did it in love," remarks Allmers. And Rita answers vehemently, "That is just it! I cannot endure to share anything with anyone. Not in love."

The true state of the case was that whilst in her avarice for the affection of her husband Rita failed in her duty to her child, she feared to see her place taken in any wise by another—feared the possibility of a disparaging contrast by which her husband's affection towards herself might be weakened. It is here that the real application of her exclamation lies: "I cannot endure to share anything with anyone. Not in love."

The final words, "Not in love," by which Rita appears to qualify her declaration of inability to share anything with anyone, in reality are worthless, coming from a woman of her character. A woman who cannot endure to share her husband's affection with her own child and with his sister, or half-sister, is not likely to endure sharing anything else with any living soul. She is avaricious in her whole being.

It has been indicated already that spiritually Allmers is not on quite so low a plane as his wife. At the time when the play opens he is, in fact, in a state of unrest; the feeling is growing within him that his life has been unreal and false. He has just returned from a long and solitary journey in the mountains, and meditation in the stillness of high altitudes has helped to give a new and better direction to his thoughts. Before he started he had been engaged in writing a book on "Human Responsibility"—not at all a strange occupation, for with men of his type there is often much devotion to theory, however poor may be their practice. On coming back he is in no humour for continuing the book. He wants to do something which will help to give him a sense of usefulness in the world. This task is to be the training of his son, so that

even though Eyolf be physically maimed he shall yet be a paragon of intellect. One danger in the case of Allmers is that he now may become centred in the son to the exclusion of all other obligations, just as the wife is centred in the husband.

It is in the spiritual transformation and redemption of both husband and wife that the real drama of "Little Eyolf" consists. And the preparation for this transformation is the chief work of the Rat-Wife. Laying a spell on the child, on whom the father has come to dote, she brings a tragedy into the house of the Allmers which shakes it to its foundations. The poor, crippled child slips out of his home to follow the Rat-Wife, and, as standing on a pier he watches her rowing away, he becomes dizzy and falls into the sea. The treasure on which the heart of Allmers had just been most of all set is taken away. And, as a consequence of the tragedy, the wife, whose sole treasure was her husband, finds herself estranged from, despised and almost hated by, him. Moreover, she is conscience-stricken with the recollection of her neglect of her child. The "two big eyes" of the child, which in imagination she sees gazing from the depth of the waters, are ever upon her.

Thus do the Allmers pass through the furnace until the souls of both are purified—until in the end they rise to a new life. "There is a change in me now," says Rita, "I feel the anguish of it." "Anguish?" exclaims the husband interrogatively. "Yes, for change, too, is a sort of birth," she replies. And Allmers responds with the words, "It is—or a resurrection. Transition to a higher life."

So it is to prove for both of them. In consistent and sacrificial labour for the service of Humanity

their redemption is to be perfected and happiness acquired.

But what is to be said as to the place of Little Eyolf in the ethical scheme of the play? Dr. Brandes, writing of this work, said: "A kind of dualism has always been perceptible in Ibsen; he pleads the cause of Nature, and he castigates Nature with mystic morality: only sometimes Nature is allowed the first voice, sometimes morality. In 'The Master Builder' and in 'Ghosts' the lover of Nature was predominant: here" (that is, in "Little Eyolf") "and in 'The Wild Duck' the castigator is in the ascendant."

I take it that in saying that Ibsen "pleads the cause of Nature" and yet "castigates Nature with mystic morality," Brandes means that while Ibsen invites us in general to have faith in Nature's laws he, nevertheless, passes a severely moral judgment on the operations of Nature as affecting human well-being in particular cases. To me it appears that the presentation which Brandes thus gives of the ethical problem does not do justice to Ibsen's position. In fact, it is misleading. We misunderstand the position of Ibsen if we suppose that he expressed or implied the existence of anything like a conflict between Nature and Man, or between Nature and our higher conceptions of morality.

In my opinion, the view which Ibsen takes is that the operations of Nature are governed by laws which in their effects on human life are essentially beneficent and moral, and that they only appear otherwise because of those perversions of human will which bring us into conflict with them.

When, however, we speak of perversions of human

will, and consider the penalties which Nature imposes, we must be careful to bear in mind that Ibsen, in formulating the problem which our common observation of the facts forces upon us, always has regard to our collective life and responsibility, not less than to our individual life and responsibility. The Pauline doctrine that we are all members of one body was received by him with no sort of qualification, and was applied with severely logical consistency.

The sufferer is not always the sinner. But, if we except the relatively few cases in which disaster may be ascribed to what in charter parties is called "the act of God," cases as to the spiritual origin of which inquiry would lead us far, with very disputatious results—suffering is a matter of human responsibility. At some time and somewhere in the social organism there has been sin of which the suffering is the consequence.

This certainly was the belief of Ibsen. In my opinion, therefore, it is misleading to suggest that in "Little Eyolf" he "castigates Nature with mystic morality," or, indeed, castigates Nature in any sense of the term. So far as there is an element of mysticism in Ibsen's presentation of his theme it is, in my belief, due to the thoroughness of his conviction that the natural world is, so to speak, interpenetrated by the spiritual world, and to the peculiarly vivid way in which he realised the doctrine of the unity of the human family—and saw that it was inherent in the very constitution of the universe that the acts of each of us must have a far-spreading influence on the well-being of all the rest.

In the words which I have quoted Dr. Brandes is speaking not alone of the child Eyolf, but of Mr.

and Mrs. Allmers and of Asta. I am not concerned to follow out his statement in detail as it bears on these other characters ; I speak of it in relation to Eyolf more especially. Little Eyolf is not the victim of Nature's cruelty. The lameness with which he is afflicted is due to the neglect of his parents who, when he was an infant, had laid him on a table to sleep. They had walled him in with pillows, but, thereafter, as the author is careful to indicate, they had forgotten him completely in the pursuit of their own pleasures, so that on awakening he had fallen from the table.

The prime cause of Eyolf's lameness has been the passion of Mrs. Allmers to engross the attention of her husband : the author would not have worked out his scheme consistently if he had not made this apparent. It is true that the consequences of the particular incident of the forgetfulness and neglect of the Allmers seem to be disproportionately large ; in the fact that a child is afflicted with incurable lameness because for a brief time the parents pursue their own pleasures there seems to be a want of balance between cause and effect. But actually it is not so. The forgetfulness and neglect are themselves the result of a state of thought and feeling which belong to the whole character of the husband and wife, and especially of the wife. The author employs the resources of his art with wonderful skill for the purpose of impressing this upon us.

And the tragedy of the drowning of little Eyolf, is this not in like manner the result of human defect ? The morbid conditions of thought and feeling from which little Eyolf suffers are consequent upon his lameness, and it is these that make him the ready victim of the Rat-Wife. Ibsen represents Allmers

as conscious of the connection between the lameness of the child and his untimely end. When Allmers is reproaching Rita in respect to the occasion of the lameness, he says, as he clenches his fists before her face : " In that hour you condemned little Eyolf to death."

A charge of neglect and undue absorption in their own concerns may be brought against the parents, even in regard to the immediate circumstances of the drowning. In his desire to make it clear that he is not dealing with a conflict between Nature and Man, but with events that belong to the plane of human volition, Ibsen makes the parents reproach themselves, even whilst they speak in reproach of the spectators of the disaster, for not succouring the child. " They could swim, every one of them," says Allmers. Yet they did nothing at all. The facts of the situation are, however, thus revealed later on :

Allmers.—The truth is, we have not done much for the poor people down there.

Rita.—We have done nothing for them.

Allmers.—Scarcely even thought of them.

Rita.—Never thought of them in sympathy.

Allmers.—We, who had "the gold, and the green forests"—

Rita.—Our hands were closed to them. And our hearts too.

Allmers (nods).—Then it was perhaps natural enough, after all, that they should not risk their lives to save little Eyolf.

Rita (softly).—Think, Alfred ! Are you so certain that—that we would have risked ours ?

Thus the evidence of human responsibility is all-sufficient. There is really no castigation of Nature at all.

Ibsen was conscious, however, that to place the

fate of little Eyolf before us in this way, and to leave the matter there, would not satisfy our conceptions of Divine justice.

The redemption of the Allmers dates in a measure from the time when the child was crippled. But it dates chiefly from the time of the drowning. We are confirmed in the view that in the main what we call accidents are not fortuitous happenings, but part of an ordered redemptive and progressive scheme. Still, it is evident that Ibsen felt that our conviction that the universe is ruled according to laws of eternal justice would be unsatisfied if he left on our minds the impression that the apparent sacrifice of Eyolf to bring about the redemption of his parents was not accompanied by the manifestation of Divine care and compassion for Eyolf himself. With magical art he succeeds in suggesting that this care and compassion were indeed present ; and hints are given of the existence of Eyolf in a spiritual world in which compensation for the evils of this life are provided.

Discussing the mission which they have taken up—the mission of succouring the children of the many poor around them, the parents thus converse, and these are the closing words of the play :

Allmers.—We have a heavy day of work before us, Rita.

Rita.—You will see—that now and then a Sabbath peace will descend upon us.

Allmers (quietly, with emotion).—Then, perhaps, we shall know that the spirits are with us.

Rita (whispering).—The spirits ?

Allmers (as before).—Yes, they will perhaps be around us—those whom we have lost.

Rita (nods slowly).—Our little Eyolf. . . .

Allmers (gazing straight before him).—Now and then, perhaps, we may still—on the way through life—have a little, passing glimpse of them.

Rita.—Where shall we look for them, Alfred?

Allmers (fixing his eyes upon her).—Upwards.

Rita (nods in approval).—Yes, yes—upwards.

Allmers.—Upwards—towards the peaks. Towards the stars. And towards the great silence.

Some readers may imagine that Ibsen closed this play on such a serene and lofty religious note merely as a concession to convention or pious sentiment. Those who adopt that view know very little indeed about Ibsen's character. The author of "Ghosts" and "An Enemy of the People" never treated any theme in a way that was likely to be inconsistent with or to give misleading impressions of his private and personal convictions. No, of this we may be certain—in "Little Eyolf" we have Ibsen's own mature convictions in respect to the problems of life and death with which the play deals, and also in respect to the problem of the existence of a future state.

Chapter XIII

The Last Phase

“ John Gabriel Borkman ”—Evidence of Declining Power
—A Partial Resumé of Ibsen’s Social Teaching—One
of Ibsen’s Finest Types of Womanhood—The Larger
Spirit of Charity.

THE two remaining plays with which we are concerned in this survey of the work of Ibsen, the only two which he was yet to write, are “ John Gabriel Borkman ” and “ When we Dead Awaken.” I have remarked that in these plays we have no new or further development of Ibsen’s powers, and that in some respects they bear evidence of decline.

Ibsen was quite conscious that his working days were drawing to an end. In a letter which he wrote to Dr. Brandes on April 24th, 1896, in reference to “ John Gabriel Borkman,” he says: “ I am engaged in preparing for a big, new work, and I do not wish to put off the writing of it longer than necessary. It might easily happen that a roof-tile might fall on my head before I had ‘ found time to make the last verse.’ And what then ? ”

I attach importance to this letter because from my study of “ John Gabriel Borkman,” I am inclined to think that Ibsen’s chief aim in writing this play may have been to recapitulate and give in a concentrated form the main features of his social teaching. Much of his solicitude with respect to it

may have been due to his consciousness that whilst his working days were drawing to a close, it was a supremely difficult task which he proposed to accomplish, one that would tax his utmost powers if he was to perform it worthily.

Whatever the underlying aim may have been, the event proved that the task of writing this new play was too great for the now veteran dramatist. The first and second acts of "John Gabriel Borkman" are equal to the best of his previous work, but in the third and fourth acts there is a distinct falling-off. In my opinion, these acts do not sufficiently "ring true" to be quite acceptable, either on the stage or in the closet. Further, they suffer from the fact that too many ideas, as well as strong and deep impressions and emotions have been compressed into them, thus making a picture which is too big for the frame. Apart from these artistic defects, however, there is much even in the third and fourth acts which is of great value. And, undoubtedly, the work as a whole has all the appearance of a partial resumé of Ibsen's social teaching. The enforcement of the doctrine that truthfulness is vital to the well-being of society is foremost in it. Bound up with the presentation of this theme are those views of the sacredness of contracts for which Ibsen has such profound regard.

Much of the tragedy in the lives of the Borkmans is due to the fact that the public and private confidence which Borkman possessed as a banker was abused—widespread ruin being caused by his audacious speculations with the securities entrusted to him.

The failure of the bank has reduced Mr. and Mrs. Borkman to utter dependence on the twin sister

of Mrs. Borkman, Miss Ella Rentheim, the woman whom, but for his selfishness, pride, and love of power Borkman would have married. It has separated husband and wife, so that they live as strangers in the house which the bounty of the twin sister provides. In the picture which he gives of the domestic relations thus established, and the conditions set up, as well as in his hints of the public calamity which the bank failure caused, Ibsen illustrates, though not always with success—since far too much is attempted—those views of individual and social duty and responsibility, and of the mischief of an ill-regulated love of power, which are prominent in his social plays.

Then, too, Ibsen's views on the necessity for freedom in human relations—on the right of each man and woman to live his or her own life, subject to the equal right of others—and his views on the subjects of marriage and heredity are also fully illustrated. Ella Rentheim—who is one of the few really fine types of women that Ibsen drew—with an intense love for Borkman, a belief that marriage between them would be in all respects good and helpful for both, has quietly stood aside whilst Borkman, in the pursuit of his own ambitious and wilful course of life, has married her sister. She has respected to the full his right to freedom of action. If, as a result, her feelings have been wounded to the quick, this has never caused her for a moment to fail in her duty to him or to her sister in their misfortune.

One may easily perceive not only that the predisposition of Ella Rentheim to respect the freedom of others, explains her more than tolerant attitude towards the marriage which took place between

Borkman and her sister, but that her lofty sense of duty in respect to the fulfilment of obligations explains her reproachful attitude to her sister's bitter treatment of Borkman, because of the ruin which he had brought on the family. Mrs. Borkman had married for better or for worse. But in practice she had no disposition or power to endure the worse. Very different is the view of marriage which Ella entertains. In the powerful interview which she has with Borkman in the upper gallery, where he lives alone "like a sick wolf," she exclaims: "If I could have stood at your side when the crash came. . . . Trust me, I should have borne it all so gladly along with you. The shame—the ruin—I would have helped you to bear it all."

Ibsen succeeds more or less in implying that if Borkman had only been guided by his good genius "the crash" never would have come; if he had married Ella the whole course of his life would have been different and better; further, that there is no evil in the present life of the Borkmans which is not made doubly greater from the disposition of Mrs. Borkman to regard matters solely from the point of view of her own wounded pride and ruined interests.

The rivalry between the sisters for chief control over Borkman's son, Erhart, is one of the unpleasant features of the play. But it should be observed that when the crisis comes, and Erhart decides to be no longer "mothered" by either sister, but to take his own course and to link his fortunes with the rich "widow," Mrs. Fanny Wilton, Ella Rentheim not only speaks of and acts towards Mrs. Wilton in the larger spirit of charity, but respects the freedom of action of Mrs. Wilton and of Erhart,

just as she had originally respected the freedom of action of Borkman and of her sister. Admittedly the motives of the play in this matter are somewhat blurred. But it is not difficult to see that Ibsen is trying to express those doctrines of freedom to which, earlier on in his work as a dramatist, he gave utterance.

The doctrines of heredity are so prominent in Ibsen's writings that many people regard his insistence upon them as of the nature of idiosyncrasy. We have these doctrines illustrated in "John Gabriel Borkman" in the callousness and self-will of Erhart, in whom many of the characteristics of both his parents are traceable.

It should not escape observation, however, that in this play Ibsen gives proof of his peculiar frankness by presenting a problem of heredity which at first sight might be thought to tell against his own theories. It is in the contrasting characters of the twin sisters, Ella Rentheim and Mrs. Borkman.

That two women born of the same parents and at the same time should develop such absolute difference of character, the one sagacious, large-hearted and self-sacrificing, the other short-sighted, narrow, cold and selfish, may well be a matter of wonder. It suggests aspects of the problem of heredity which almost baffle the judgment.

Admittedly, human nature is of such complexity, is made up of such diverse elements, that calculation and prediction as to inherited qualities become vastly difficult, if not impossible. It is self-evident, however, that qualities, good or bad, cannot be transmitted unless they previously exist in those who transmit them. Therefore, nothing that can possibly arise in the actual experience of life can

rob the doctrine of heredity of its importance, or make the consideration of the physical, mental and moral conditions of parenthood matters of minor concern.

It may be that in his treatment of heredity in this play Ibsen desired to lay this aspect of the problem before us. Certainly the two sisters are vividly drawn, and the contrast between them is complete. In addition to those which I have indicated the work has many fine features. Of the play as a whole, however, one can but say that it is the work of a giant whose powers were becoming dulled by age, though they still had in them much of their former strength and glory.

Chapter XIV

Art for the Sake of Life

“ When we Dead Awaken ”—A Dramatic Epilogue—Why so Described—The Doctrine of “ Art for Art’s Sake ” Condemned—A Personal Vindication.

I BSEN, from the time when he wrote “ Pillars of Society,” had produced plays at intervals of two years, except in the case of “ An Enemy of the People,” when the interval was one year, the greater expedition being due to the stimulus of the adverse criticism, or, to use Mr. Archer’s word, “ abuse,” which “ Ghosts ” had met with. He had got through the task of writing “ John Gabriel Borkman ” within his usual limits of time. No roof-tile had fallen on his head ; his health continued good ; despite the weakness shown in the later parts of “ John Gabriel Borkman ” there was reasonable ground for hope that he would yet do good work.

There is evidence, however, that his premonition of the approaching end of his literary activities was persistent. He gave himself a long rest, but when at last he entered on his next, which was to be his final work, it is recorded by Dr. Elias that he did so with such strain and agitation, with such spasmodic and feverish effort, that those around him were almost alarmed in observing it. “ He must get on with his work, he must get on ! He seemed to hear the beating of dark pinions over

his head. He seemed to feel the grim Visitant, who had accompanied Alfred Allmers on the mountain paths, already standing behind him with uplifted hand. His relatives were firmly convinced that he knew quite clearly that this would be his last play, and that he was to write no more. And soon the blow fell." "When we Dead Awaken" appeared towards the end of 1899, and after a period of second childhood, both mental and physical, Ibsen died in 1906, being then in his seventy-ninth year.

This book does not aim to be completely biographical, but it is necessary for me to mention these facts, because they help to explain the judgment which must be passed on the last of Ibsen's writings.

"When we Dead Awaken" is masterly in its central ideas, and equally is it masterly in construction and in all the externals of literary form. But in much of the symbolism used, and in many of the incidents of the action, there is so much strain and exaggeration that, sound though the central ideas must be admitted to be, once they are properly discerned, the work, as it advances, acquires something of the character of a nightmare; the student is in danger of missing the real spiritual significance of the work in the perplexity caused by the imagery and incidents used to convey the author's meaning. Yet this meaning is so entirely true and so completely in accord with all the rest of Ibsen's message, that we cannot but be thankful that he so pathetically devoted his declining energies to express it, whatever disappointment we may feel at his manner of achieving his object.

Ibsen described "When we Dead Awaken" as "A Dramatic Epilogue." Even in this fact we have

support for the view that his aim in writing it was to "round off" his dramatic productions—an aim which, as I have pointed out, may already have been present to his mind when he was writing "John Gabriel Borkman," into which so much of his social teaching is concentrated.

The title of his "Epilogue" was itself suggestive of the spirit and aim of the dramatist at this period of his life. Ibsen, who through the greater part of his literary work had been trying to shake men out of their spiritual slumbers, and to help them to rise to higher things on stepping-stones of their dead selves, now in his "Epilogue" appears to have yearned to proclaim in trumpet tones a final message to emphasise and secure attention to the doctrine which he regarded as of chief importance in all that had gone before.

The evil of selfishness, and especially of the selfishness which is expressed in the love of power divorced from the love of usefulness, from real human serviceableness, had been a familiar theme with Ibsen, even from the time when "Brand" was written. In one way or another, he had been continually exposing this as one of the worst of evils, as at the root of most of the others by which society is afflicted. One may very easily perceive in "The Master Builder" his sense of the harmfulness done by this evil, but it appears in various degrees of intensity in "Peer Gynt," in "Pillars of Society," "An Enemy of the People," "Rosmersholm," "Hedda Gabler," and, indeed, in all the plays from "Brand" onwards.

There was, however, one specific manifestation of the selfish love of power which Ibsen had not yet dealt with, yet a manifestation which was in itself

typical of all other forms, and one that it was peculiarly fitting that he should include in the scope of his work. This was the manifestation of a selfish love of power as displayed in the vocation of the artist.

Ibsen as an artist of the theatre had heard much of the controversy which ranged round the aphorism "Art for art's sake." Some of the strongest or most severe criticism of his work, artistically considered, had been levelled at its manifest didactic tendency. And in the nature of the case, this criticism came chiefly from the exponents of the doctrine "Art for art's sake."

It is conceivable that Ibsen had been as much stung by this sort of criticism, directed against his work generally, as he was by the criticism against "Ghosts" more particularly, which, after all, was based not alone on allegations that he had done violence to good taste and decency, but that he had abused his art for the sake of enforcing his opinions—which in the view of his critics was as gross a violation of the doctrine of "Art for art's sake" as any of which he could have been guilty.

When we read of the feverishness with which Ibsen set about his final task, and his eagerness to get it accomplished, may we not reasonably divine an underlying anxiety to answer his critics once more, as he had done in "An Enemy of the People"—though on this occasion on a wider issue—and at the same time, to concentrate and emphasise a feature of his teaching which he felt to be of paramount importance? May it not be in this, indeed, that the secret of the writing of the "Epilogue" lies?

"When we Dead Awaken" is in the general an affirmation of Ibsen's views on the effects of human

selfishness, as shown in the love of power for its own sake ; in the particular it is a condemnation of the doctrine which fosters the love of art for art's sake ; it is a proclamation of the doctrine that art should be pursued for the sake of human serviceableness, the advancement of the ideals of practical life ; it is an affirmation that it is in the degree in which this aim is preserved, consciously or subconsciously, that art is vital and progressive.

Arnold Rubek, the sculptor, in his earlier days of aspiration and enthusiasm, had conceived a masterpiece, "The Resurrection Day." In speaking to Irene, who had been his model, he thus describes his original aim and the character of his work :

"It was to be called 'The Resurrection Day'—figured in the likeness of a young woman awakening from the sleep of Death. . . . It was to be the awakening of the noblest, purest, most ideal woman the world ever saw. . . . I wanted to embody the pure woman as I saw her awakening on the Resurrection Day. Not marvelling at anything new and unknown and undivined, but filled with a sacred joy at finding herself unchanged—she, the woman of earth—in the higher, freer, happier region—after the long, dreamless sleep of death. Thus did I fashion her—I fashioned her in your image, Irene."

The work was great in aim and, as originally modelled in the clay, was greatly done. It came to be altered later on. But "that is another story."

What relation had Rubek's achievement, as thus far completed, to his spiritual health, to his inner development and progress ?

Irene, in whose image the masterpiece had been made, who was, indeed, the source of inspiration to the artist—the woman to whom the finer spiritual qualities of the work must be ascribed—who, therefore, rightly speaks of the work as their "child"

—was capable of leading the artist on to still greater achievements. But for this to have been possible, it was necessary that the artist should love not chiefly the product of his hands, the work which testified to his power as an artist, and ministered to his vanity and material advantage—that he should not even regard the beauty which he had succeeded in expressing as itself the end or goal of his activities.

Ibsen places this truth before us symbolically. Irene has yearned to be united to Rubek in marriage. She discerns that for him and for herself the union would be fruitful of spiritual good. But he treats his relationship with her as a mere “episode” in his work as an artist. Her relationship with him has been the most entirely intimate in which any woman can stand to any man—subject to the preservation of her virtue. Yet, when his masterpiece is finished, he thinks that he can dismiss her from his life—passing, as he imagines will be possible, to new work which will extend his fame and, incidentally, his riches. And the effect has been entirely evil in the lives of both of them.

When Irene afterwards tells Rubek how she came to efface herself, and how her love had been turned into something like hate (in the conversation in the second act), Rubek asks: “Was it jealousy that moved you, then?” Irene replies coldly: “I think it was rather hatred.” “Hatred? Hatred for me?” exclaims Rubek. And Irene responds with vehemence: “Yes, for you—for the artist who had so lightly and carelessly taken a warm-blooded body, a young human life, and worn the soul out of it—because you needed it for a work of art.”

"You were an artist, and an artist only—not a man," she later on remarks.

Obviously, the spiritual call which Irene had made to the finer qualities of Rubek, and the promise of good which lay within it, symbolise the view of art in relation to life—art for the sake of fruitful human service—which Ibsen sought to illustrate. In the picture of the obliviousness of Rubek to that call, and in the description of the results which follow, the author expresses his view of the evil of the consistent pursuit of art for art's sake. The injury and loss to Humanity are symbolised in the wasted and even mischievous lives of Rubek and Irene alike.

In particular, let it be observed that, as a consequence of his folly, the artist in Rubek has been killed, if, indeed, the real artist can be said ever to have lived. Rubek's attitude towards his art has become materialistic and cynical. He can no longer create masterpieces. His energies are given up to profitable portrait-busts. And in the making of these he inwardly mocks his patrons. He has married the pleasure-loving, sensuous and inexperienced girl, Maia. Even she is conscious of the contrast between his present and his former work. "Do you think it worthy of you to do nothing at all but a portrait-bust now and then?" she asks. And Rubek replies: "They are no mere portrait-busts, I assure you. . . . There is something equivocal, something cryptic lurking in and behind these busts—a secret something that the people themselves cannot see. . . . I alone can see it. And it amuses me unspeakably. On the surface I give them the 'striking likeness,' as they call it, that they all stand and gape at in astonishment, but at bottom they are all respectable, pompous horse-

faces, and self-opinioned donkey-muzzles, and lop-eared, low-browed dog-skulls, and fatted swine-snouts—and sometimes dull, brutal bull-fronts as well. . . . All the animals which men have be-devilled in their own image—and which have be-devilled men in return.”

As he empties his champagne-glass, he laughingly adds: “And it is these double-faced works of art that our excellent plutocrats come and order of me. And pay for in all good faith—and in good, round figures too—almost their weight in gold, as the saying is.”

Yes, Rubek, who in parting with Irene had in reality been closing his eyes to the angel in Humanity, has opened them to perceive chiefly the brute—and the devil. And in secretly mocking his patrons, as he does habitually, whilst he readily takes their gold, he is day by day testifying to his own artistic and moral degradation, and at the same time confirming himself in it.

Even with his masterpiece he had ceased to be satisfied. He had long kept the clay model by him, before he carried the work out in marble. He had thought to improve it by making additions of other figures. Yet this only arose from the restlessness of his unbalanced nature, and his desire to satisfy a now depraved judgment. Simplicity and purity had ceased to appeal to him as they did once. With each addition the work had been injured—the beautiful figure representing “The Resurrection Day” had become merely one in a group—and a receding figure at that. She had represented the resurrection of the good; the new figures represent the resurrection of the evil. “I expanded the plinth—made it wide and spacious. And on it I

placed a segment of the curving, bursting earth. And up from the fissures of the soil there now swarm men and women with dimly suggested animal faces. Women and men—as I knew them in real life.” *

By the irony of Fate, it is to Irene that he relates all this, the demented Irene, who, after long years, has again sought him out. With a now growing consciousness of the errors of his life, he adds :

“ Let me tell you, too, how I have placed myself in the group. In front, beside a fountain, sits a man weighed down with guilt, who cannot quite free himself from the earth-crust. I call him ‘ Remorse for a Forfeited Life.’ He sits there and dips his fingers in the purling stream—to wash them clean—and he is gnawed and tortured by the thought that never, never will he succeed. Never in all eternity will he attain to freedom and the new life. He will remain for ever prisoned in his hell.”

The words which follow this speech of Rubek are in themselves indicative of the idea which I hold to have been central in the mind of Ibsen when he wrote this play. Having heard Rubek’s account of the change in his work, and listened with disgust to what he has said as to the introduction of his own figure into the group, Irene exclaims hardly, coldly, and with contemptuous reproach : “ Poet ! ” “ Why poet ? ” asks Rubek. And Irene answered : “ Because you are nervous and sluggish and full of forgiveness for all the sins of your life, in thought

* Rather strangely, Mr. Archer came to the conclusion that Ibsen had represented that Rubek had altered his work *after* it was executed in the marble, and, therefore, in his introduction to the play he remarks that “ in actual sculpture ” the development of Rubek’s statue into a group would have been “ a grotesque impossibility.” Mr. Archer’s criticism is based on a misunderstanding, due, no doubt, to the very allusive—and therefore elusive—way in which the various incidents relating to the sculpture are referred to.

and in act. You have killed my soul—so you model yourself in remorse, and self-accusation, and penance. And with that you think your account is cleared.”

The state which Irene describes is indeed the culmination of the spiritual degeneracy which comes to the artist from the pursuit of art for art's sake. But Rubek makes a defiant attempt to defend himself. “I am an artist, Irene,” he exclaims. “And I take no shame to myself for the frailties that perhaps cling to me. For I was born to be an artist.”

Born to be an artist! His destiny as Rubek himself judged it meant “born to pursue art for art's sake alone.” And from this all the evil of his life has come.

Notwithstanding the alterations which had been made in his work—nay, perhaps, because of them, since they ministered to a depraved public taste—the masterpiece had been everywhere acclaimed. It had brought him fame and fortune. None the less his course had been downward from the time when Irene had parted from him.

Happily, in the epoch of his life to which the action of the play is devoted a true sense of the errors which he has committed has been coming to him. In a conversation which he has with Maia, before the one above quoted, he tells how all the talk about the artist's vocation and the artist's mission—by which, of course, he means all the false talk which he had himself been accustomed to use—had already begun to strike him as being very empty, and hollow, and meaningless at bottom. “Then what would you put in its place?” asks Maia. “Life, Maia,” Rubek replies. “Is not life in sun-

shine and in beauty a hundred times better than to—wear yourself out in a perpetual struggle with lumps of clay and blocks of stone ? ”

On a superficial view it might seem that all art is being condemned or disparaged in these words of Rubek. But the words are merely the over-accentuated expression of the feelings of a man who has come to see that he has pursued art wrongly. Making art an end in itself, and not life, he has missed art and life alike.

Other details of the symbolism of the play hardly call for interpretation ; they are entirely subordinate. Ibsen strengthens his picture of the ideals for which Irene stood, and to which Rubek had failed to dedicate his life, by introducing the character of the landed proprietor and hunter, Ulfheim, whose grossness and sensuality are finely portrayed. Ulfheim represents the materialistic view of life pursued without conscience or sensibility. We see that it is with him that Maia, in her merely animal love of freedom and her fondness for the more physical and superficial joys of life, must ultimately ally herself.

The Divine love and care for suffering Humanity and the ministry of religion are symbolised in the Sister of Mercy, by whom Irene is constantly watched and whose “ *Pax vobiscum* ” is uttered at the close, when in the thunderstorm high up in the mountain Irene and Rubek, who have found a new affinity with one another, are whirled along with masses of snow and, finally, are buried in them.

The presence of this gracious figure helps to give a note of optimism to the conclusion of the play. Neither Rubek nor Irene had ever really lived—Rubek because he had not followed the higher

spiritual call which Irene made to him, and she because she had from this cause been denied the companionship which should have been hers. Rubek had become conscious of his error ; the two were coming together in a spiritual union ; the dead were awakening already. But it was too late—at least on this plane of existence. The life of Humanity is continuous ; the errors of one generation may be repaired in the next ; for Humanity there are possibilities of unlimited progress even here. But for the individual ? If the greater mistakes and follies of the individual life are to be remedied it must be on a new plane of existence. And, remembering how in “ Little Eyolf ” Ibsen points to the prospect of consolation, of help coming to the Allmers from the spirits of those who have gone before, and how a belief in a future life thus is affirmed, it is not vain to suppose that in his latest play he means us to assume that in a spiritual world Rubek and Irene are united, and that for both of them the “ Pax vobiscum ” of the Sister of Mercy meant the attainment of peace other than the peace of mortal death.

Be this as it may, it is plain that despite the feebler form of utterance which came with old age, Ibsen ended his work with a message which was as clear as it was consistent with all that had gone before, and that “ When we Dead Awaken ” is at once a reaffirmation of doctrines which he held dear, and a vindication of his aims as an artist and of the spirit of his life-work.

Using the language of metaphor, when the curtain has fallen on the last of his plays may we not say that on it we may see, if we but have the spiritual vision, mystic characters which are expressive

of all that lies behind the whole of his work, and which spell: Love, Duty, Service, Truth and Freedom.

Early in his career he had declared that Truth and Freedom were the Pillars of Society. This declaration is reiterated in various forms throughout his writings. But that Love, with Duty and Service as its natural fruits, comes first of all—that it is the foundation on which the pillars and, indeed, the whole superstructure of Society must rest, is equally affirmed in his plays; in general by implication, it is true, but none the less clearly.

It is this doctrine of unselfish love as the highest need of Man, and of the artist most of all, that Ibsen proclaims in his final play—his “dramatic epilogue.” For here the tragedy comes as it comes in “John Gabriel Borkman,” and in so many of the plays of Ibsen, from failure to recognise the true end and meaning of life, and from the rejection, through self-will and love of power, of the treasures of human affection—treasures which symbolise, whilst they are themselves a part of, the forces of good which abound in the universe and are ever ready to flow in where the channel is made for them.

Chapter XV

Mysticism and Idealism

Ibsen as a Mystic—Universality of his Outlook—Absence of Religious Dogmatism—Effect of his Mysticism on the Form of his Work—The Complaint of the Absence of Constructive Teaching—Conclusion.

IN the title of this book I refer to Ibsen not only as poet and as moralist—descriptions which obviously are applicable—but also as mystic. To some readers it may seem that this last-named title requires explanation and justification.

In the conventional and generally accepted sense of the term a mystic is one who is possessed by the belief that God cannot rightly be apprehended by any ordinary process of knowledge, but only by immediate intuition which transcends knowledge: the mystic is the possessor of an ecstatic vision or communion, in which he becomes, as it were, one with the Divine Being.

It must be admitted with all frankness that Ibsen did not seek to formulate any sort of doctrine of a Divine Personality, neither did he affect to have an intimate relation with the Supreme Ruler of the universe. His attitude towards all schools of religion was peculiarly broad, universal and detached. The inquiry "What was Ibsen's religion?" would be as idle and profitless as a similar inquiry has been in the case of Shakespeare, if the answer to the question were to be dependent

on the application of definite tests of orthodox faiths of organised churches. The student who seeks to deduce religious dogmas of any sort from his writings will have a difficult, if not an impossible task; any appearance of success must be dependent on special pleading, as it has been in the similar attempt in the case of the writings of Shakespeare.

And yet I do not hesitate to say that Ibsen was as truly a religious mystic as any whom even the Church of Rome has placed in its calendar of saints because of her recognition of their spiritual insight and their faith in and fidelity to the inner light. In vivid consciousness that behind the outward phenomena of life vast and powerful spiritual forces are at work; in perception of the moral tendency of those forces, and in apprehension of the operation of the human will in affecting the perception and reception of these forces and in modifying their consequences to individual and social life, he was essentially a mystic.

After all, whether a man apprehends God vividly as a definite Personality, as did Thomas à Kempis, or as a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness, as did Matthew Arnold, of itself makes no difference as regards the presence of mysticism in his character. The primary thing is that his apprehension of the Ruling Power of the universe, however that Power be named or defined, shall be dependent rather on intuition than on intellectual conviction or on outward authority, and that the intuitional apprehension, where it exists, shall determine and govern the whole outlook on life, the thought, judgment and action of him who possesses it.

In dealing with "Little Eyolf," I quoted a saying of Dr. Brandes to the effect that in this and in other plays Ibsen appeared to castigate Nature "with mystical morality." I had occasion to offer a few words of criticism on Dr. Brandes's way of putting the point, which I thought somewhat misleading. That criticism I need not repeat. It is worth observing, however, that Dr. Brandes not only discerned and laid stress upon the presence of a mystical element in the writings of Ibsen, but appreciated the fact that this mysticism in Ibsen peculiarly affected his moral outlook. I will go farther, and say that it even affected the form of his art.

The mystical temperament and habit of mind of Ibsen made him contemplate man in all his relations as a spiritual being—a spiritual being in a material environment which, by the nature and laws of his life, he can govern for good or for ill. From this cause, certainly from the time when he wrote "Brand" and onwards to the close of his career, he was continually putting his characters in a setting, so to speak—amidst scenery, in dwellings, with furniture, and in clothing which expressed and accorded with their spiritual state. No other dramatist has ever gone so far and been so successful in this respect as he. And in the speeches and incidents of his plays the dominance of the spiritual side is always so evident and persistent that we may see clearly that it is with man in his spiritual relations almost alone that Ibsen is concerned; that nothing material has value to him save so far as it is the medium for the expression of spiritual facts.

This mental attitude of Ibsen partly explains

the dreamlike character of much of his work, a feature so much present in several of his scenes that we almost feel that they would appeal to us as more true if they were put before us as dreams, pure and simple. The boldness or freedom with which, as I have pointed out in "Ibsen as a Religious Teacher" (*Contemporary Review*, June, 1908), and also in my chapter on "The Lady from the Sea" in this volume, Ibsen introduces characters who, like the Strange Passenger in "Peer Gynt," must be assumed to be subjective creations—"to have no more existence on the material plane than has the Ghost of Banquo in 'Macbeth'"—may also, I think, be explained mainly by the fact that Ibsen's habitual outlook was that of the mystic.

But this is a matter on which I cannot here dwell further. The reader who cannot from his own sympathy and intuition perceive the qualities of mysticism in Ibsen is not likely to be much impressed by any argument that I can bring to bear on the subject, and it is necessary now for me to bring this work to a close.

In a speech which he made at a festival of the Norwegian Women's Rights' League, at Christiania, on May 26th, 1898, Ibsen, no doubt having in mind, as the text of the speech showed, some of the exaggerated and some of the mistaken conclusions which had been drawn from his treatment of the character of Nora in "The Doll's House"—conclusions on which I have commented—said: "I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. . . . My task has been the description of Humanity."

I do not doubt that in these words Ibsen expressed his real belief about his work. And I do not

doubt that it was a belief which was in accordance with the facts of the case. He *was* more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seemed inclined to believe, his task *had* been "the description of Humanity."

But it was impossible for Ibsen to deny, and in the words quoted he does not deny, that his office had been that of the social philosopher as well as the poet. His claim is a claim to have credit for greater breadth and universality of outlook than he was given credit for in the course of the fierce controversies which were excited by his presentation of social problems in many of his plays—controversies which the plays from their whole trend and character naturally and inevitably provoked.

If it were consistently borne in mind that Ibsen was poet first and social philosopher afterwards, it would become much easier to do justice to him in both characters. His task was "the description of Humanity." He surveyed Humanity in all its aspects, but especially at that stage of its evolution in which he found it. He saw it in its strength, and in its weakness; in its beauty and in its ugliness. In all these aspects he was profoundly interested; there was none of them that did not appeal to his inner consciousness as worthy of his regard.

But there was this distinctive feature in the character of Ibsen, that he never could divest himself from the conception of life as a mission. Those views of the office and function of the artist which he symbolised so powerfully in "When we Dead Awaken," precluded him from cultivating and maintaining an absolutely detached relationship towards the pulsing life of his age. If, as when he

engaged in his researches for "Emperor and Galilean," he studied the history of the past for long months together, it was the bearing of those researches on the practical needs of the present which, in his own mind, invested them with their real value. But from the time when he wrote the play just named, even elaborate historical research was itself put aside; his chief interests henceforth lay almost solely in the conditions of his own time. And, in relation to those conditions, he could not sit still and view the panorama of life as a mere interested spectator, or consider that his sole office was to describe what he saw and felt; he could not bear himself as one who thought that his triumph should consist simply in the truth and beauty of the description of Humanity which he had penned. To have done this would have been to have worked in the spirit of Rubek as portrayed in "When we Dead Awaken"—a spirit which he condemns as fatal and unworthy.

No, in Ibsen the social philosopher trod closely on the heels of the poet, so closely that, though it remains true both of Ibsen's aims and achievements that he was more a poet than a social philosopher, the social philosopher came very near acquiring dominance over the poet. In my belief this accounts for a feature of his work which Mr. Archer, Mr. Gosse and other commentators have noted, viz. that occasionally, in the course of writing a play, he appears to have shifted his point of view. And it accounts also and chiefly for the comparatively limited range of his subject-matter from the time when he commenced to write his more definitely social plays, almost the whole period which followed the writing of "Emperor and Galilean."

I know that to most of the devotees of Ibsen, and certainly to those who value him as a world-poet, it will seem heresy for me to say it, but I am bound in the interests of a true presentation of this subject to emphasise that, in the way I indicate, the range of Ibsen's subject-matter *was* limited. The themes which he dealt with, and the types of character which he drew, above all the moods of life which he reflected, all come within definite compass. If his mental powers as a poet would have enabled him, had he so chosen, to have displayed even the breadth and universality of a Shakespeare, a quality which some enthusiasts have claimed that he actually possessed, his sympathies as a social philosopher induced him to concentrate those powers on a few chosen themes which appeared to him to be of vital importance. But these he always approached with the poet's mind, with the poet's insight. Had he not been more of a poet than a social philosopher, had his task not been the description of Humanity—albeit of Humanity in certain specific phases—his power as a social philosopher would not have been so great as it has proved to be. It would not have been felt, as it certainly is felt by all those who know and understand his work, that he spoke with more than the social philosopher's authority—that he spoke as one who saw into the very inmost of things, and as one who, in his mental estimates and moral judgments, was not liable to be deceived by external appearances.

I have but a few words to say in conclusion. If it should appear to the reader that on the whole I have dealt with Ibsen as a social philosopher even more than I have dealt with him as a poet, and very much more than I have dealt with him as a mystic,

I feel that I need offer no apology on that score. The subject of Ibsen is a very big one ; each man must give prominence to that aspect of it which interests him most, and which, for that reason, perhaps, he best understands. Thus, ultimately, a true and comprehensive judgment will be formed, and Ibsen's place in literature finally determined.

Ibsen's greatness as a poet and mystic seems to me indisputable. Perhaps it would have been less challenged if he had been less concerned to work as a social philosopher, if he had been less definitely a moralist. But, sharing the principles as to art in relation to life which " *When we Dead Awaken* " symbolises, I regard the position of Ibsen as a moralist as one of his chief glories.

In my chapter on " *Emperor and Galilean* " I dwelt upon the subject of the spiritual development of Ibsen at a time which was crucial in this development. I described the way in which Ibsen, disappointed with the religious and social ideals of his time, engaged in a work of historical retrospect with a view to the recovery or the discovery, as the case might be, of truths which he believed to be vital to human progress. I explained how, in studying the facts of the earlier days of Christianity, he was led to a corresponding study of Pagan teaching, and how, ultimately, he formulated a new ideal, in which the higher qualities of the Empires of Paganism and of Christianity, as he conceived them, might be blended. In this ideal, which Ibsen figured by the term " *the Third Empire*," the joy of life of Paganism, nobly conceived, was to be blended with the Christian conception of love, duty and service. I showed, however, that the conclusion was borne in upon him the more he gave his mind

to the consideration of the present and future aspects of human progress, that neither the ideal which he had formulated, and on a festive occasion had even submitted in all seriousness as a toast, nor any other worthy ideal, could be ushered in until the countless shams, conventions and limitations of his age, of which he was becoming increasingly sensible, had been effectively assailed.

What those shams, conventions and limitations were, and Ibsen's method of attacking them, we have seen in dealing with the social plays by which the psychological plays, which help to emphasise his chief aims, were followed.

Do we feel rather oppressed when we consider that the aims of Ibsen were in the main destructive? Let us not forget what has been indicated already, that the work which he did was precisely that which in his day and generation needed most to be done.

The complaint of the absence of constructive teaching in Ibsen's work is at best superficial and shallow. After all, a similar criticism might be passed even on the Ten Commandments. These are supremely negative and destructive, being based entirely on the reiterated proclamation: "Thou shalt not." From knowledge of what shall not be done a simple inference may be drawn as to what should be done. Ibsen points to one trait of character and to another, to this way of thinking, and of acting, and to that, and he exclaims: "Behold how unreal, how false, how ugly, and how evil it all is." Blinded by habit or convention, hindered by self-interest, or misled by sheer want of thought, we may not have seen the unreality, the falsity, the ugliness, or the evil; we may not have looked and understood. Ibsen, with the power of expression

of the poet, the insight of the mystic, and the judgment of the moralist assists us to open our eyes, or assists us to look and to understand. Thus we may the better appreciate the true, the beautiful, and the good. Thus are we aided towards constructive work.

This surely must be recognised by every fair-minded student. The more it is recognised the more it will be felt that the world owes much to Ibsen for the destructive work which he did, and which, through his writings, he still is doing. Of him it may truly be said that he did the duty that lay nearest to him. If, when in the days of his prime, he never found time to engage in purely constructive work, and if, apparently, in his later years he concluded that no work other than the analytical and destructive was then possible to him, this cannot justly affect our estimate of his character and genius. All that he had strength to do he did well and truly, with dauntless courage and honest purpose. And, as we have seen, his work was chiefly that of preparing Humanity for the reception of new and better ideals.

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